

The balancing act of persuasion:
A relevance-theoretic perspective

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ABSTRACT

This thesis provides an interdisciplinary account of persuasion, a form of communication in which, I argue, persuader and target aim to strike a balance between benefiting from communication and protecting themselves from deception. The unifying research framework is Relevance Theory (Sperber & Wilson, 1995), which treats cognition as relevance-oriented, and inferential intention recognition as central to communication.

In Chapter 1, I review previous pragmatic accounts of persuasion and show that while they may explain how the target understands the persuader's message, they shed little light on why this message is believed or disbelieved. In Chapter 2, I examine the causal role of intentions and their effects on the mental lives of persuader and target. I argue that the goal of the persuader is to induce in the target the intention to perform a specific action. In Chapter 3, I review some accounts in the social psychology literature of how this goal can be achieved.

Chapter 4 is concerned with rationality issues: what techniques can a rational persuader use, and how can a rational audience strike a balance between benefiting from communication and guarding against the risk of manipulation? Chapter 5 reconsiders these questions from an evolutionary perspective, and argues that adaptive strategies for persuasion and counter-persuasion are special cases of more general evolutionary tendencies.

Finally, I apply the proposed framework to marketing and discuss the accelerated evolutionary effects that persuasive/defensive strategies and cultures of consumption have on each other. I conclude that these strategies, as both artifacts of culture and facilitators of cultural transmission, provide interesting insights into human cultural evolution.

THE BALANCING ACT OF PERSUASION: A RELEVANCE-THEORETIC PERSPECTIVE

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Cette thèse est dédiée à mes deux grand-mères qui m'ont toujours inspirée
par leur courage et leur ouverture d'esprit.

INTRODUCTION

“Go Left, Feel Right.” [Gap UK billboard campaign for left-weave jeans, January 2005.]

“Understanding juror thought processes...greatly enhances the advocate’s ability to persuade.” [Excerpt from the “trial services” page of the website of DOAR¹, a litigation advisory firm.]

“The result? (...) tailored, compelling college applications that not only showcase (a student’s) assets but point out just where and how **that** student will contribute to the academic and social community at **that** college.” [Excerpt from the website of College Lab², a “College Applications Advisor.”]

“However, persuasion evangelism need not be so confrontational ... but there is no reason to forget to be gentle and respectful in the process. Intentionality and direction do not require heavy-handed tactics.” [Excerpt from the website of a publisher of books about religion³.]

¹ <http://www.doar.com>

² <http://www.collegelab.net/403753.html>

³ from the website of WordAction Publishing Company , a “not-for-profit organization that provides curriculum resources to enable people of all ages to discover God’s Word.” <http://www.nph.com/nphweb/html/waol/articleDisplay.jsp?mediaId=2360384&catSecCd=ART4>

“Our hope and our prayer is not that we’ll get 100 percent of their ability to communicate, but rather that we will be persuasive enough with the people who would have to implement the orders of the senior people in that regime, and persuade them that it is clearly not in their interest to obey those types of orders.” [Excerpt from an interview of Donald Rumsfeld, US Secretary of Defense on March 21, 2003, commenting on the state of the command and control structure in Iraq⁴.]

““Mark and Luke are living rebuttals to the claim that embryos are not people,” Lucinda Borden told subcommittee members. Of the embryos, she said, “We plead with you not to fund their slaughter.”

Her husband then held up his children before the legislators. “Which one of my children would you kill?” he asked. “Which one would you choose to take?””[Excerpted from a news report on a hearing held on July 17, 2001 by a US Congressional Government Reform subcommittee on stem cell research funding⁵.]

⁴ from the NewsHour with Jim Lehrer,
http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/middle_east/jan-june03/rumsfeld_3-21.html

⁵ <http://archives.cnn.com/2001/HEALTH/07/17/stem.cell.hearing/>

1. Capturing the nature of persuasion

Examples of persuasion abound. From marketing to law, from education to religion and from warfare to scientific research, most facets of modern Western cultures are infused with persuasion. Having just read six examples highlighting the effectiveness of different stylistic and tactical facets of persuasion, we are reminded that, while persuasion has always been an important element of human communication, it is now so tightly woven into the fabric of these cultures that it has become an accepted and inescapable fact of life. Yet, while persuasion is used and studied from many different angles, it still holds plenty of mystery and its mechanisms are relatively unexplored.

The study of persuasion has its roots in the work of classical rhetoricians, starting with the Sophists, Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. In *Rhetoric*, Aristotle outlined three “means of persuasion:” argumentation, appeal to the audience’s emotions and reliance on the credibility of the persuader; he thus raised the possibility that persuasion need not involve argumentation, a notion that is very relevant to current work, as I will show throughout this thesis. From the works of medieval philosophers to modern philosophy, persuasion has attracted interest within broader domains including the study of moral responsibility, rationality, agency, free will, intentions and action. In literature, the effects of persuasion have also been examined and described. Jane Austen, for instance, in the aptly titled *Persuasion* writes about a young woman who, having been persuaded by her family to reject a suitor’s marriage proposal, subsequently spends many years trying to persuade him that she did indeed love him. Persuasion clearly exerts a pressure strong enough to alter the course of lives. More recently, persuasion has been studied by social psychologists and the resulting research has been increasingly

used by marketing professionals⁶. Social psychology research on persuasion is usually traced back to work on the effectiveness of propaganda in the United States during World War II. Over the past twenty years, this research has focused on the so-called “dual routes” to persuasion, one appealing to systematic, effortful reasoning and the other to faster heuristic processes. Much of this work has been done in the context of the study of consumer behavior.

In some ways, the mechanisms of persuasion have been endowed with a certain aura of mystery and mythology. Vague, but remarkably popular and resistant notions such as subliminal persuasion, “neurolinguistic” persuasion and hypno-persuasion episodically surface with a host of anecdotal support, and make for exciting dinner party conversations. The explosion of communication opportunities triggered by the huge technological advances in the media since the 1950’s have created both opportunities and challenges for marketers of goods, services, ideas and beliefs. As new channels are unveiled every day, offering faster and more direct ways to reach the right audiences, there is increasing pressure on marketers to compete for these audiences’ attention. Each marketer wants the message he has developed and delivered to stand out above the cacophony of all the other messages. When a certain amount of interest in a given product or service already exists, either because the target has identified a need for it, or because of previous exposure, the information contained in the marketer’s message

⁶ The reference of the terms ‘marketing professional’ or ‘professional marketers’ in this context is fairly broad. While the most common use of the terms refers to the marketers of consumer goods and services (both the marketing staff of the company that makes or sells the items, and the advertising agency team in charge of creating the marketing campaigns and placing it in the right media), it also applies to marketers of beliefs or attitudes (advocating a position for or against a given issue), political campaigns, high-ranking government officials (justifying warfare strategies), university applications (admissions consultants), jury selection in high profile cases, medical research (adoptive parents arguing against stem cell research), and many other arenas.

will be more likely to have some effect, as it will reinforce previously held attitudes. However, more randomly targeted messages can be successful when they are appropriately crafted.

Often, media which reach large audiences do not allow for as much accuracy in targeting a message as those that capture smaller audiences of “qualified” potential customers. An ad has to be tailored to appeal either to a wide audience of less interested, or less knowledgeable consumers, or to a smaller audience with more focus and expertise. While a particularly wide audience is guaranteed to advertisers willing to pay the huge premium for the right to advertise during the annual Super Bowl on US television, capturing the attention of the 90 million viewers is a great challenge. As advertisers have competed through the years to bring the most striking and entertaining commercials to Super Bowl viewers, those viewers’ expectations are constantly being raised. So much emphasis is placed on the unveiling of new commercials on Super Bowl Sunday that advertising agencies play a tricky game of pretending to guard their secrecy while allowing sneak previews to circulate in order to generate anticipation. At the other end of the spectrum, the internet offers the opportunity to communicate very effectively with a specific audience, but requires the appropriate audience to be driven to the relevant site via a link from another site, a search engine or a non-virtual medium such as an appropriately targeted radio or newspaper ad. A great deal of research, both academic and industry-led, has been devoted to gaining a better understanding of how to choose the right medium to reach the attention of potential consumers of a given item, and how to craft the most effective message for that audience in that medium.

Catching an audience’s attention, however, is not enough for the marketing professional. The clutter is such that even an attention-grabbing ad can provide good entertainment but fail to result in the

audience recalling either it or the advertised brand name after just a few hours or days, much less in their purchasing or consuming the item. Many steps remain to be taken for the audience member to become a customer. Exactly what these intermediate steps are is subject to debate. How does a marketer gauge whether her efforts have been successful? While several possible indicators are commonly used, such as attitude change, recall rate, market share shifts, etc, the overriding question that remains to be answered is, “What exactly constitutes successful persuasion?” This question arises in every field, from casual persuasion attempts among family members (“take a coat, it’s cold out”) to political campaigns, product launches and other high profile persuasion exercises. Trying to characterize successful persuasion directly in terms of whether it has achieved its intended consequences seems too crude. While you may have persuaded me to take a coat because it is cold, I might still go out without a coat because I couldn’t find my coat, or because someone else persuaded me in the meantime that it might get very warm this afternoon. Similarly, a candidate may have won the election in spite of his own campaign’s failure to persuade voters that he was the right man for the job, simply because the opposing candidate’s own stand was so appalling that voters chose what they perceived to be the lesser of two evils. In general, a successful persuasion attempt may result in several possible outcomes: the target may gain new knowledge, she may form a belief, change her attitude, adopt an intention to perform a particular action, or actually perform that action.

Clouding the issue even more is the question of what constitutes persuasion from the persuader’s perspective. While the billions of dollars spent annually on marketing leave no doubt as to the ultimate intentions of professional marketers, that is, to sell products (goods, services or ideas), a given marketing attempt could be motivated by

more immediate goals, such as introducing a new brand or establishing an important feature of a product, without these goals actually involving selling the product. In natural communication, the communicator's intentions can also be difficult to read, and this may lead to some breakdowns in understanding. As mundane an utterance as a casual greeting to an acquaintance on the street could be an attempt to persuade her that I (the communicator) am willing to engage in a longer conversation. One might ask whether every act of communication cannot to some extent be interpreted as an act of persuasion. Certainly, understanding the communicator's intentions plays a central role in communicating, but some intentions may not always be clear even to the communicator herself. In the case of the casual greeting, I would be hard-pressed to characterize my exact goal in uttering a rather formulaic greeting: it could indeed have been a persuasive attempt to appear friendly and approachable, but it could also have been a fairly unreflective utterance, almost an automatic social reflex that I produce any time I see a familiar face on the street. Not only is reading the intentions of others a risky business, but sometimes even one's own intentions are not so introspectively transparent.

To summarize briefly, although long regarded as an element of communication and social interaction, persuasion has increased greatly in its pervasiveness and become a critical component of consumption-driven cultures. In spite of the tremendous resources invested by professional persuaders in the intense competition for attention, the processes of persuasive communication are not well understood, nor are its effects or how to evaluate them. External observers and the interlocutors (communicator and audience) themselves face great difficulty in identifying and isolating the communicator's goals and the effects of communication on the audience. Shedding some light on this set of difficulties is the first aim of this thesis. The question is, what is

the nature of persuasion? What makes a communicative act persuasive as we trace it from its genesis in the persuader's mind to its effects on the target? If we are to explore this type of communicative act and understand its nature, we must seek a better understanding of the full range of cognitive and communicative processes underlying it.

2. Issues of rationality

While ever greater resources are being poured into marketing campaigns, media blitzes and the development of global corporate brands, increasing concern is voiced by consumer groups, education experts and social commentators about the effect of these commercial assaults on our minds, our children's minds and our cultures. Although expressions of concern vary in their intensity and style, some go so far as to compare the risks posed by global marketing forces with the devastation of natural catastrophes such as the South-East Asian Tsunami (Lasn, 2005). Implicit in these expressions of concern is the notion that we, or the more vulnerable members of our societies, are not able to withstand the onslaught of commercially-driven persuasion to which we are subjected. The worry goes beyond a certain malaise about the impact of corporate forces on culture and raises broader questions about rationality. To claim that modern Western cultures, or we, as their individual members, are unable to cope rationally with the manifestations of marketing is to suggest that we are in danger of suffering a breakdown in rationality. This in turn raises questions about the nature of rationality itself. Throughout this thesis, I have adopted an evolutionary approach in which rationality is characterized by the adoption of solutions that enhance, or preserve, fitness. I will therefore be casting my discussion of persuasion within a broader, evolutionary perspective.

Communication of any form involves an intention by the communicator to affect the audience's attitudes, and raises an expectation in the audience that some benefits can be obtained from attending to the communicative act. In the case of persuasive communication, it is intuitively clear that both the intention and the expected beneficial effects go beyond those involved in ordinary non-persuasive communication. Apart from clarifying how more or less deliberate persuasive acts can result in the effects intended by persuaders, any study of persuasion must answer questions about why it is rational for these persuaders to use persuasion, and to do so in a particular way, and why it is rational for targets to allow themselves to be persuaded. From the audience's point of view, rationality issues have much to do with the availability of time and cognitive resources. In a world with no resource limits, we would probably want to scrutinize all the information that comes our way, evaluate it against existing beliefs and attitudes and update them where necessary. In reality, these processes are generally heavily constrained and the potential benefit to be gained from scrutiny has to be weighed against the time and cognitive resources expended. These constraints can justify the use of shortcut strategies or heuristics, which can lead to optimal results, but at a certain risk of failure on individual calls. I will explore these strategies and their roles in both the production and the processing of persuasive acts. The role of rationality in an account of persuasion from an evolutionary perspective constitutes the second theme of the thesis.

3. Marketing and cultural evolution

Few exercises are as entertaining as reading through the ads in old magazines, or viewing old television commercials such as those in some

of the original soap opera shows. The language, delivery and claims not only seem old-fashioned and naïve, but their ineffectiveness for today's audiences borders on the ridiculous. That the humor, far from being intentional, lies in the inappropriateness of both form and content for contemporary expectations shows how quickly these parameters have changed. Implicit throughout this introduction has been the assumption that the use of persuasion has evolved, throughout the latter part of the 20th century and into the 21st century, at the same pace as the media revolution and consumerism.

For an advertiser to develop an attention-grabbing and relevant advertisement for a certain audience is a complex and dynamic process that requires accurate evaluation of the fast-shifting mood of that target audience. Persuasive strategies, their effectiveness, our tolerance or resistance to them and communication in general, all important components of culture, evolve fast. While rationality-preserving coping strategies enable us to recognize and build up immunity to persuasive strategies, these persuasive strategies evolve to become less immediately recognizable and more effective. These effects, their counter-effects and their consequences for communication and culture are another important theme of this thesis. Tying these issues into an overview of the interplay between marketing and culture provides an interesting and productive application, shedding more light on the proposed account of persuasion while improving our understanding of marketing and consumer behavior, and offering some insight into the cultural evolution of consumerism and its countercurrents.

4. Persuasion and relevance theory

The three main themes of this thesis are, then, the interface between the communicative and cognitive aspects of persuasion, the rationality

of persuading and of being persuaded, and the evolution of persuasion as an element of social transmission, with particular focus on its current role in marketing. Given the diversity of these themes, and the perspectives from which they have been studied, it is particularly important to provide a unifying framework within which to approach them. I will argue that relevance theory (Sperber and Wilson, 1986, 1995) is an important element of such a framework.

To begin with, as we shall see in Chapter 1, relevance theory provides, an account of both the intended and the unintended cognitive effects of a communicative stimulus on an audience and of how these effects are achieved. An utterance or other communicative stimulus provides evidence of the communicator's intentions. The audience processes this evidence inferentially within a context of available assumptions, and reaches certain conclusions about the communicator's intentions. At the same time, the audience draws other conclusions which were not necessarily intended by the communicator. The relevance of a stimulus depends on how many worthwhile conclusions can be drawn, and on the amount of mental effort spent on deriving them. According to relevance theory, human cognition has evolved in a way that tends to maximize these worthwhile conclusions or positive cognitive effects, and minimize the processing effort required.

In order to communicate effectively, we craft our utterances to attract attention and make it easy for the audience to identify our communicative intentions (Sperber and Wilson, 1995, 266-278). Similarly, as an audience, our expectation is that the utterance will be worth processing and that the communicator will have made it easy for us to recognize her meaning. This inferential process of identifying the communicator's meaning is claimed (e.g. Sperber and Wilson, 2002; Wilson, 2003) to have evolved as a specialized cognitive module, or set of modules, enabling the efficient reading and processing of multiple

layers of intentions. I will argue in Chapter 2 that while audiences need not recognize a persuasive intention in order to be persuaded, a persuasive utterance is one that achieves much of its relevance by altering the audience's existing intentions, or causing them to adopt new intentions. These effects on intentions, moreover, are more or less specifically intended by the communicator (adding an extra layer of intention) and are typically facilitated by the use of specific persuasive strategies which will be discussed in more detail below.

Apart from accounting for the specific processes linked to the expression and recognition of communicative intentions, relevance theory is linked to a broader evolutionary framework which enables us to explore the rationality of persuasive communication and its place in social intelligence. According to relevance theory, the ability to infer a communicator's intentions is based on a modular comprehension mechanism which has evolved separately from more general mind-reading abilities used to attribute mental states in order to explain and predict the behavior of others (e.g. Sperber, 2000). This more general metarepresentational ability evolved in response to pressure on individuals to recognize and represent an increasing number of layers of intentions, as communicators seek to alter the mental states of others and, more specifically in the case of persuasion, their intentions, and seek to protect themselves against the intentions of others to affect their own mental states in ways that may not be beneficial. Within this framework, rationality in the face of persuasion lies in the ability not only to represent these multiple layers of intentions, but also to examine them critically and choose which to accept and which to reject. A rational persuasive communicator uses the same ability not only to represent the intention she wants the audience to adopt, but also to craft a strategy that will enable her to fulfill this (persuasive) intention. Both of these types of strategies, the audience's and the communicator's, are

linked to greater rationality considerations as they give individuals the means to remain one step ahead of others.

Finally, relevance theory also provides a framework that allows us to examine persuasion as an instance of social transmission, subject to the same evolutionary forces as other such forms. Communication plays a major role in the transmission of information from one generation to the next, and, in the evolution of cultures. Dan Sperber has developed an epidemiological model of cultural transmission (Sperber, 1996) in which the nature of inferential communication, specifically as characterized in relevance theory, helps to explain how ideas spread across cultures. Central to this approach is the idea that inferential communication allows for some transformation of the original message. When a mental representation is communicated, it is not identically reproduced in the hearer's mind; rather a new representation is inferred by the hearer that resembles the original representation in content, but may elaborate on it or summarize it in various ways. If we accept that the relationship between the speaker's and the hearer's representations is one of resemblance rather than identity of content, it becomes clear that the inferential communication of ideas may play a major role in the evolution of ideas and affect the slow and steady evolution of culture through transmission (Sperber, 1996). In the case of persuasion, both the content of a persuasive utterance and its form may constitute evolving cultural elements. For instance, as a given persuasive tactic is used repeatedly, it becomes easily recognizable to audiences and loses some of its effectiveness. Communicators, therefore, will either modify it for greater effectiveness, or abandon it for a better one. This is dramatically illustrated in the case of marketing where, as discussed earlier in this chapter, the styles and tactics of advertisements are constantly being rethought. At the same time, I will argue that by weaving itself into the fabric of culture, and in particular of

consumerism, persuasion participates in its own accelerated evolution via a feedback mechanism.

My general aim in this thesis is to sketch an account of persuasion that may help us to understand how persuasion has become such an important element of modern culture. Persuasive communication stands at the critical point where individuals' need for rationality and their social need to communicate are involved in a delicate balancing act. In persuasion, these opposing needs can, at different times, coincide, be pulled apart, or collide. By better understanding the communicative and cognitive processes underlying persuasion and how they contribute to this balancing act, I also hope to shed some light on how it has evolved, how we can expect it to evolve further, and whether social attempts to control or regulate it are likely to be worthwhile.

CHAPTER ONE

UNDERSTANDING, BELIEVING AND MORE

1. Introduction

One of our goals, when we communicate, is to be understood. Another is to be believed and, more generally, to affect our audiences' beliefs, desires intentions and actions. In attempting to persuade, we clearly want to achieve more than simply to be understood. How much more we seek to achieve, and how to characterize what lies beyond being understood, is what I will focus on in this first chapter. Intuitively, we think of a communicator who intends to persuade an audience as seeking to get this audience to form certain beliefs, desires or intentions, and/or to perform certain actions. Whether the production of a belief is necessary and sufficient for successful persuasion, and to what extent persuasion involves the production of desires, intentions or actions, is what I would like to explore.

Accounting for understanding has typically been the goal of pragmatic theorists, while explaining how attitudes change, and beliefs, desires and intentions are formed, has been the goal of cognitive and social psychologists. In my view, only by bringing these fields together can we hope to develop a plausible account of persuasion and to fully characterize its effects. So far, researchers in these disciplines have opted to disregard important aspects of persuasion, and have generally worked in isolation from each other. My principal aim in this chapter is to begin to remedy this weakness by reviewing what pragmatics has had to say about persuasion,

and recasting it within the framework of relevance theory, a cognitive theory of communication, in order to start building a bridge to the exploration of attitude formation in the context of social psychology.

2. From convention to meaning and intention

Persuading someone typically involves performing a communicative act designed to affect an audience's beliefs, desires, intentions and/or actions. As such, persuasion constitutes a "speech act," an act performed in, or by, speaking. The theory of speech acts was introduced by J. L. Austin in his William James Lectures at Harvard in 1955, and published in 1962 in his *How To Do Things With Words*. I will review Austin's work as it relates specifically to persuasion, and look at other work by speech act theorists and pragmatists who have studied similar speech acts. My aim is to show how and why persuasion and related speech acts turn out to be perplexing and somewhat frustrating for pragmatists.

2.1. Austin on illocutionary and perlocutionary acts

The verb "to persuade" is typically given as one of the first examples of a perlocutionary verb by speech act theorists. Indeed, Austin (1962), when he introduces the term "perlocutionary act", uses the utterance, "He persuaded me to shoot her" as his first example (Austin 1962, 102). Perlocutionary acts are the third in Austin's tri-partite classification of speech acts. After locutionary acts, which are simply acts "of saying something," and illocutionary acts, which are performed "in saying something," perlocutionary acts are described as performed "by saying something." Here is an example involving all three types of acts:

- (1) Locutionary act: A young woman holds up a bottle of Coca Cola

and shouts “Coke is the real thing” in front of a television camera. She has performed the locutionary act of saying that Coca Cola is the real thing: that is, of uttering a sentence with a certain sense and reference. In more recent terminology, she has expressed the proposition that drinking Coca Cola constitutes a worthwhile experience.

- (2) Illocutionary act: In shouting “Coke is the real thing,” the young woman asserts that drinking Coca Cola constitutes a real, genuine or worthwhile experience: that is, she has not only expressed this proposition, but also endorsed it, or committed herself to its truth.
- (3) Perlocutionary act: By asserting that “Coke is the real thing,” the young woman persuades millions of television viewers around the world that drinking Coca Cola is a real, genuine or worthwhile experience, and thereby gets them to buy Coke.

Austin describes perlocutionary acts as achieving “certain consequential effects upon the feelings, thoughts or acts of the audience, or of the speaker, or of other persons” (ibid., 101). These acts “may be done with the design, intention or purpose of producing them (the effects)” (ibid., 101). In other words, the intentional production of certain cognitive, affective or behavioral effects on an audience by means of an utterance qualifies as a perlocutionary act. However, not just any effects will do. The successful performance of an illocutionary act is also seen as involving the production of certain types of effects, and these must be distinguished from perlocutionary effects. In particular, an illocutionary act must achieve “uptake” (i.e., it must bring about “the understanding of the meaning and of the force of the locution,” ibid., 117), and it may also “take effect” (i.e.,

bring about “changes in the natural course of events,” *ibid.*, 117), and “invite a response” (“many illocutionary acts invite by convention a response or a sequel,” *ibid.*, 117). Let’s see how these three effects distinguish the illocutionary and perlocutionary acts in (2) and (3) above:

Uptake: In order for an illocutionary act to be successfully performed, it must be recognized as such: that is, in the example above, the audience must recognize that an assertion has been made to the effect that Coca Cola is the real thing. Clearly, the same is not necessarily true of perlocutionary acts. For instance, the audience of an act of persuasion need not always recognize that such an act has taken place. Quite the contrary: recognition of the intention to persuade can often act as a deterrent to belief, as it suggests possible manipulation by the speaker. So, while the illocutionary intention has to be recognized if it is to succeed, the success of the perlocutionary act does not necessarily depend on the perlocutionary intention being recognized, nor does the speaker necessarily intend for it to be recognized.

Taking effect: The performance of the illocutionary act “brings about changes in the natural course of events.” In the case of the assertion in (2) above, the performance of the assertion brings about a commitment on the part of the producer (ultimately Coca Cola) to the claim that it is “the real thing.” Even if Coke were to announce that they no longer stand by their claim to be “the real thing,” the fact that they had once made this claim would still exist for the public record, and might leave them open to moral or legal sanctions. Once a claim has been made, a contradictory claim does not completely erase the fact that the initial claim was made. By contrast, persuading an audience that drinking Coke is a worthwhile experience does not necessarily bring about any comparable change in the natural course of public events. Even if the audience has been successfully persuaded and intends to buy Coke, this is a reversible effect. This feature of illocutionary

acts makes it possible to use a performative formula to indicate the moment at which the illocutionary act takes effect, a point made by Austin and later debated by others (e.g. Strawson, 1964, 445; Bach and Harnish, 1979, 131). Thus, illocutionary acts can generally be performed by use of such formulas as: “I (hereby) perform v,” (where “v” is an illocutionary verb). For instance, (2) may be rephrased as (2a), whereas the perlocutionary act in (3) may not be rephrased along similar lines:

(2a) Young woman: “I hereby assert that Coke is the real thing.”

(3a)* Young woman: “I hereby persuade you that Coke is the real thing.”

Inviting a response: Austin describes certain illocutionary acts as “inviting by convention a response or a sequel” (Austin, 1962, 117). In contrast, the response or sequel resulting from a perlocutionary act cannot be said to be conventional. The criterion of conventionality is controversial, as we shall see in the course of this chapter. Hornsby (1994, 191), for instance, argues that “illocutionary consequences of speaking require no specific conventions beyond those of the locutionary acts which (arguably) they exploit.” Nonetheless, Hornsby provides the following helpful analysis of the distinction Austin had in mind (ibid., 191):

“An audience’s arriving in a state of having been warned is, in appropriate circumstances, supposedly, a conventional consequence of a speech action, whereas an audience’s coming to be persuaded is a consequence, but not a conventional one.”

Let’s try to apply this distinction to the act of assertion in (2) and the act of persuasion in (3) above. While there is no specific term in English that

describes the effects of an assertion on an audience, these effects are of interest to regulatory agencies seeking to ensure that assertions (or claims) made by advertisers do not mislead consumers and can be substantiated. For instance, the Advertising Standards Authority, the regulatory agency that enforces advertising codes in the UK, in considering what commitment has been made, reviews both the claims made in advertisements and “the overall impression created by the marketing communication”¹ (its illocutionary effects). In Austin’s framework, the fact that a certain type of impression has been created in the audience by the assertion that Coke is the real thing might be seen as a conventional consequence of the assertion. Indeed, this fits with the two other features of illocutionary acts: the assertion must be recognized as such (i.e., it must achieve “uptake”) and must bring about a change in the natural course of events because it carries a certain socially, morally or legally enforceable public commitment.

On the other hand, the perlocutionary effects of making an assertion are not conventional, according to Austin. They are not regulated by any social or legal sanctions. In his framework, perlocutionary effects are “consequential effects upon the feelings, thoughts or acts of the audience, or of the speaker, or of other persons” (Austin, 1962, 101). In the case of (3), it is plausible to assume that Coca Cola intends at the very least for the audience to find it desirable to buy Coke. This is clearly a consequence that goes beyond the conventional creation of a certain type of “impression;” and it is neither guaranteed nor predictable that making a claim about a beverage will result in people buying it.

Let’s take one more example of an utterance involving both a clear illocutionary act and a perlocutionary act. Consider the advertising slogan

¹ See the ASA website, under “General Rules” and “Codes of Advertising Practice”: http://www.asa.org.uk/asa/codes/cap_code/ShowCode.htm?clause_id=1489

long used by the mail-order and internet clothing company Lands' End (sic):

(4) Guaranteed. Period.²

(4) combines the illocutionary act of asserting (or, more specifically, guaranteeing) with the perlocutionary act of persuading. The illocutionary effects are along the lines of those described above: recognizing that a formal guarantee has been issued is what makes the customer understand that he can get compensation if the purchased goods are inadequate; the guarantee changes the natural course of events in that there is now a commitment that goods will be refunded or exchanged if they are defective. The perlocutionary effect depends, among other things, on the customer not just understanding that a guarantee is in effect, but believing that the guarantee will indeed be honored, and therefore makes it worth his while to choose Lands' End over one of its competitors. For this to happen, the company cannot rely on any convention, no matter how much of a legal obligation an advertised guarantee constitutes, but only on customers believing that this obligation is a good enough reason to choose Lands' End. By suggesting, in the second part of the statement ("Period") that there are no conditions attached, the company strengthens the guarantee and seeks to increase the likelihood of being believed, but must ultimately rely on customers to believe the guarantee and decide to buy from them.

Austin further attempts to characterize the distinction between illocutionary and perlocutionary effects by contrasting the two following statements:³

(5) I ordered the children to stop shouting, and they obeyed.

² Marketing slogan used by Lands' End in their advertising, see www.landsend.com.

(6) I got the children to stop shouting.

According to Austin's analysis, in (5), the children obey, partly as a result of having recognized that an order has been issued for them to stop shouting. The "invited" response to the order is obedience, and recognizing this is recognizing an illocutionary effect. In (6), in contrast, the illocutionary act is not specified, and the children's compliance is a perlocutionary effect of whatever act (illocutionary or non-verbal) was performed by the speaker. Thus, perlocutionary effects may be specified as part of the "invited response" to an illocutionary act, as in (5), or simply caused by some act of the speaker, as in (6). In either case, some change of attitude (e.g., belief, desire or intention) must take place in the hearer as a prerequisite to any action, and any such change that goes beyond "uptake" is a perlocutionary effect.

I agree with Austin that there is an important difference between (5) and (6). In (5), one of the speaker's intentions in communicating is to order the children to stop shouting. This intention could itself result from a higher-order intention to make the children stop shouting, or, alternatively, it could result from an intention to test the children's obedience or the speaker's authority. The fact that the children stopped shouting, although a result of the order, is not necessarily what the speaker primarily intended. In (6), on the other hand, the speaker was clearly acting on a higher-order intention to "get the children to stop shouting," and was attempting to bring about this result by whatever means seemed best.

Example (6) serves to illustrate two important points. The first is that Austin clearly considered it possible that almost any act of communication could result in perlocutionary effects. The second point, implied by the first, is that what makes a speech act a perlocutionary act is the

³ Austin's actual examples are: "I ordered him and he obeyed," and "I got him to obey,"

communicator's higher-order intention, not its effects. It is the speaker's intention to achieve a certain perlocutionary effect which marks a perlocutionary act, and persuasion in particular, as I will argue throughout this thesis. I will try to show that this intention to produce specified perlocutionary effects is more than just a feature of perlocutionary acts, it is a necessary ingredient to their success. In other words, I reject the view that perlocutionary acts can be characterized simply by the effects they bring about (whether or not these effects are intended), and argue instead that they are characterized by the intention to produce these effects. I will defend this argument in detail in Chapters 2 and 4.

While Austin's view that illocutionary acts are in some sense conventional has been widely debated, his more general account of speech acts was critical in setting the stage for further investigation of the intentions behind communicative stimuli and their effects. In the rest of this chapter, I will explore more recent accounts of the relation between the speaker's intentions and their effects on the audience's mental states and actions within a broadly pragmatic framework.

2.2. Grice on intention recognition and cooperation

Paul Grice laid the foundations for much current work on communication by moving away from code-based theories of language and arguing that understanding an utterance involves inferring the speaker's meaning (i.e., the meaning that the speaker overtly intended to communicate, in a sense that Grice and others have attempted to clarify). While Grice's general approach to communication has strongly influenced the approach taken in this thesis, I will focus, in this section, on two key aspects which are relevant to the study of persuasion: his theory of meaning, as discussed in his 1957 article "Meaning" (1989, 213-223), and his theory of conversation

Austin (1962, 117, footnote).

based on the Cooperative Principle and maxims, as discussed in “Logic and Conversation,” (1989, 22-40), one of his William James Lectures.

Grice proposes the following characterization of what it is for a speaker to mean something by an utterance or action x, in effect elaborating on Austin’s notion of uptake within his own intention-based framework:

“A must intend to induce by x a belief in an audience, and he must also intend his utterance to be recognized as so intended...the recognition is intended by A to play its part in inducing the belief, and if it does not do so something will have gone wrong...” (Grice, 1989, 219)

While Grice’s account of the recognition of the communicative intention and Austin’s notion of uptake have much in common, the two accounts differ on one critical point. Grice’s notion of meaning includes recognition by the audience that the speaker intends him to form a certain belief, while Austin’s characterization of uptake does not directly address the issue of belief production (but merely involves recognition of the illocutionary act as such). In other words, Grice’s notion of meaning seems to extend beyond Austin’s in treating belief production as central to communication. For Austin, by contrast, belief production is a perlocutionary effect, and recognition of the speaker’s intention to produce this effect plays no part in his account of understanding or uptake. If we follow Grice’s logic, the speaker has at the very least produced one perlocutionary effect in fulfilling her communicative intention – that of getting the audience to believe what she says. This account poses a problem for our analysis of persuasion. Does successful persuasion require belief production and, if so, how do we distinguish persuasion from other forms of communication (which, on this approach, also involve the production of beliefs)? More generally, since

Grice observes that “something will have gone wrong” if a belief is not induced through communication, how wrong can things go, and what effects, either short of belief or beyond belief, may be produced?

This issue continued to take center stage in subsequent work by philosophers such as Strawson and Searle, and, as I will argue in section 3, was not satisfactorily resolved until the introduction by Sperber and Wilson (1986, 1995) of a distinction between two layers of speaker intentions, an informative intention and a communicative intention. Without this distinction, the illocutionary effect of achieving uptake, or understanding, and the perlocutionary effect of belief production are in danger of remaining hopelessly entangled.

A second aspect of Grice’s theory that is relevant to the study of persuasion is the Cooperative Principle, as quoted below (and its accompanying conversational maxims of quantity, quality, relation and manner):

“Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged”
(Grice, 1989, 26).

Grice’s characterization of communication as necessarily involving cooperation and the recognition of a “common purpose,” or at least an “accepted direction,” between participants is particularly interesting in the context of persuasion:

It is not difficult to imagine communicative situations in which the participants do not cooperate with each other to achieve some common purpose beyond understanding each other. These cases of non-cooperation can arise either because there is no opportunity for cooperation, for instance

in one-way communication (e.g., broadcasting), or because the participants' goals are at odds or simply divergent on the issues at hand.

In Strand Six of his *Retrospective Epilogue* (1989, 368-372), Grice addresses some of these issues and acknowledges that:

“We should recognize that within the dimension of voluntary exchanges ... collaboration in achieving exchange of information or the institution of decisions may coexist with a high degree of reserve, hostility, and chicanery and with a high degree of diversity in the motivations underlying quite meager common objectives” (ibid., 369).

Grice proposes to treat such cases as “parasitic” on more standard, cooperative exchanges. This clarification raises questions about how prevalent less-than-cooperative communication really is, and about how to analyze what goes on in such situations. In reality, diverging agendas between a communicator and her audience, far from being exceptional, often seem to be integral to human communication. Sperber (2000 a, 135), for instance, argues that the human need to rely on communication in order to gather information leaves us “vulnerable to misinformation, deception and misguidance.” In fact, we will see in the next section that relevance theory does not automatically require any cooperation between the interlocutors beyond the shared goal of understanding and being understood.

A broader analysis of communication suggests that, while some degree of cooperation can be useful, the higher-order goals of interlocutors, beyond simply achieving uptake, can often be at odds. The communicator's goal of achieving a certain cognitive effect on the audience, and the hearer's own goal of learning from the communicator on his own terms, clearly diverge.

If the hearer's "terms" are flexible enough, some degree of cooperation can be attained, but this requires trust and careful calibration of the hearer's defense mechanisms against deception or manipulation. Indeed, it has been argued that this lack of cooperation is so inherent to human communication that it has led to the evolution of complex forms of communication such as testimony, argumentation and persuasion, as well as the ability to scrutinize communicative stimuli for signs of deception (see Sperber, 2001). I will be discussing this evolutionary perspective in greater detail in the last two chapters of this thesis.

On the other hand, as indicated above, cooperation in the Gricean sense does indeed facilitate the process of communication, and is itself desirable for this reason. This paradox is one of the elements of the balancing act in which interlocutors engage. I would like to suggest that a theory of communication based on a principle of cooperation, in Grice's sense, fails to take this paradox into account, and places unrealistic conditions on communication. Marketing communication, even emanating from the most honest and respectable firms, is a case at point. The marketer's main intention in communicating with her customers is to sell, whether this is her short-term goal, as in the case of a media "blitz," or part of a wider strategy such as building a brand. Consider (7), for example:

- (7) We want to make a difference in your vacation planning. Tell us how you like to travel.

While the travel company is giving the impression that it is soliciting its customers' input and suggesting that it wants to engage in a collaborative process, customers do not necessarily believe that the marketing manager who wrote (7) is all that interested in their travel plans. A theory of communication, and an adequate account of persuasion, must be able to

explain how such stimuli are understood and the advertisers' persuasive intention fulfilled without relying on a Gricean Cooperative Principle.

2.3. Strawson's higher-order intentions

In "Intention and convention in speech acts," Strawson (1964) questions many of Austin's claims in *How To Do Things With Words*, and argues in particular that illocutionary acts do not always rely on convention, but may also hinge on the recognition of intentions not backed by any conventions. Having shown with the help of examples that convention is not a necessary feature of illocutionary acts, Strawson proposes a new analysis of meaning and of illocutionary effects. He begins by reformulating Grice's (1957, 1989) definition of meaning as follows:

"S nonnaturally means something by an utterance x if S intends (i₁) to produce by uttering x a certain response (r) in an audience A, and intends (i₂) that A shall recognize S's intention (i₁) and intends (i₃) that this recognition on the part of A of S's intention (i₁) shall function as A's reason, or a part of his reason, for his response r" (Strawson, 1964, 446).

Here, Strawson replaces Grice's term "effect" with the term "response," which, in his view, "covers cognitive and affective states or attitudes as well as actions" (ibid., 446), and tries to link this (Gricean) definition of meaning in terms of intentions to Austin's notion of illocutionary effects. The first illocutionary effect mentioned by Austin is securing uptake: that is, "bringing about the understanding of the meaning and of the force of the locution," which is equivalent to (i₂) above. According to Strawson, a speaker who overtly intends an audience to achieve uptake of an

illocutionary act must entertain a higher-order intention (i_4) that the audience recognize (i_2). Strawson argues that this new intention (i_4) fills a gap in Grice's definition of meaning, which would otherwise wrongly characterize as overtly communicative, certain cases in which the speaker's intention (i_2) is not made overt or transparent, but concealed in some way. In fact, as I will argue in Section 3 below, and as suspected by Strawson, the extra layer of intention turns out not to completely resolve the overtness issue, and hence it leaves the required notion of overt communication inadequately explained (Sperber and Wilson, 1986, 1995, 30-31).

Critical in this intention-based account, according to Strawson, is (i_3), the intention that recognition of (i_1) should function as part of the reason for the audience's illocutionary response. In other words, "securing of the response r is intended to be mediated by the securing of another (and always cognitive) effect in A ; namely, recognition of S 's intention to secure response r ." (Strawson, 1964, 446). Having established these different levels of intention, Strawson goes on to characterize speech acts according to the effects they are intended to produce beyond securing uptake, "by means of the production of the primary response r ," (ibid., 452). For Grice, the intended effect was, of course, for the audience to form certain beliefs.

Strawson (1964) argues that this revised Gricean framework adequately distinguishes illocutionary from perlocutionary acts. For instance, "showing off" is not an illocutionary act, since it does not depend for its success on the audience recognizing that the speaker intends to impress them. In fact, the recognition of the speaker's intention to show off usually acts as a deterrent to its fulfillment. As a consequence, showing off doesn't meet the requirements on illocutionary acts identified by Austin (1962), and is correctly identified as a perlocutionary act. Let's now go back to examples (5) and (6) above, which Austin used to illustrate the difference

between illocutionary and perlocutionary acts. Strawson's revised account, which includes the requirement that the speaker intend the recognition of her intention to serve as part of the reason for producing the intended response, does indeed successfully capture the distinction between the two types of acts:

(5) I ordered the children to stop shouting, and they obeyed.

(6) I got the children to stop shouting.

In (5), let's suppose that the parent's intention is to secure the response that the children stop shouting (rather than to test her authority, let's say). She makes this intention known to the children by producing an order (possibly by using an imperative with an appropriate tone of voice and a determined expression). The children recognize the mother's intention that they should stop shouting, understand it, take account of her determination and decide to stop shouting. The intended response, the children obeying the order, is indeed secured "by means of the recognition of the intention to secure it" (Strawson, 1964, 452). Without this recognition, the children might well have believed that the mother was joking, or was less than determined to get them to stop shouting. In the case of (6), it is left open how the parent got the children to stop shouting; in other words, the response is not secured partly **by means of** the recognition of the parent's intention that they should stop shouting.

Strawson does succeed in providing an alternative account of illocutionary acts that does not rely solely on an appeal to convention to bring about the intended effects. He goes on to show that these effects often go beyond the "primary response": the speaker may encourage "certain line of conduct or a certain attitude... by means of the production

of the primary response” (ibid., 452). This allows for the possibility that the cognitive effects intended by the speaker may go beyond the formation of beliefs to include other types of perlocutionary effects. Whether these effects are intended to come about as side-effects of the primary response, and how they relate to the speaker’s intentions, is a crucial issue for the analysis of persuasion, as I will argue throughout the rest of this thesis. In fact, Strawson touches briefly (ibid., 453) on an interesting distinction between the intention to bring about a “complex primary response” (e.g., in the case of an illocutionary act such as warning) and the intention to bring about a “primary response and a further effect” (e.g., in the case of showing off). The difference between the two types of intentions lies in whether the response (or effect) is brought about by means of the recognition of the intention to bring it about, or simply produced as a result of a separate intention. This is a distinction which I believe is important in the analysis of persuasion and which I will revisit in some detail in Chapters 2 and 4.

Strawson’s contribution to the analysis of illocutionary and perlocutionary acts is crucial for two main reasons: it integrates Grice’s intention-based account of meaning with the original Austin framework, and it digs deeper into the relationships between intentions and their effects. In particular, he suggests that communication may involve many layers of intention beyond those originally envisaged by Grice. This layering of intentions and their corresponding effects is an important element of the framework I will propose for analyzing persuasive communication. These issues are further clarified and significantly developed by Bach and Harnish (1979), and, within a broader context, by Sperber and Wilson (1986, 1995).

2.4. Searle and the “rules of meaning”

In his book *Speech Acts*, Searle (1969) questions Grice’s early definition of meaning, as presented above, on several counts. Most importantly for

our purposes, Searle objects to Grice's reference in his definition to the speaker-intended perlocutionary effect of inducing a belief. Searle raises three objections (ibid., 46), summarized below:

- (a) Searle points to what he sees as clear examples of illocutionary acts, such as greetings, that are not linked to a perlocutionary effect of inducing a belief. One might argue against this objection (and thereby side with Grice) by analyzing an illocutionary act, such as a greeting as having the intended effect of getting the hearer to believe that the speaker is being polite, or that she is adhering to social norms, or that she likes the hearer, or wishes him well, and so on.
- (b) A speaker may "say something and mean it without in fact intending to produce that effect" (e.g. belief, or any other type of perlocutionary effect). Searle (ibid., 46) uses the example of saying something out of duty, without caring whether the hearer believes it or not. One might argue against this second objection along the following lines: when stating something out of duty – for instance, when I try to "go on record" with a particular opinion – I do have the perlocutionary intention of causing someone at some point in the future to make use of the documented fact that I made a particular statement. This could be in order to induce some belief in a potential future audience, maybe an audience of historians that might want to examine the "record" on a given issue. Alternatively, I may want my audience to believe that I believe what I said, without necessarily believing it themselves. In either case, I intend to produce some belief.

(c) The speaker does not generally intend the hearer's reason for believing her utterance to be the fact that she intends him to believe it. Clearly, intending an audience to believe what was said is not always sufficient to get the audience to form that belief. While I agree with Searle that perlocutionary intentions can be fulfilled without being recognized, I do not believe that this is a valid objection to the claim that all acts of communication carry perlocutionary intentions.

While Searle's objections to Grice's statement that "something will have gone wrong" with an utterance when the appropriate belief is not induced are debatable, I also believe that Grice's statement itself is too strong. On the one hand, as noted above, a speaker can be understood without necessarily being believed (or even expecting to be believed). On the other hand, a perlocutionary act of persuasion can be successful without the hearer necessarily believing what was communicated. After viewing a TV commercial for a new shampoo, a consumer may have understood the claim that the shampoo would give her hair new bounce, but fail to believe it (because she never believes commercials), and yet still decide to buy it because she liked the music featured in the commercial. Even if we look at the entire commercial as one speech act and include the music as an element of this speech act, we cannot claim that the music induced any sort of belief. The communicator was understood and the persuasive intention (to sell the shampoo) fulfilled without the communicator's message being believed.

Searle goes on to argue that the intended effect of an utterance is not, in the first instance, to induce a belief or a response, but simply to get the hearer to recognize the intention to induce a certain response. How can this recognition be achieved? Here, Searle falls back on Austin's idea that

illocutionary intentions must be backed by conventions. As he says, there must be “knowledge (recognition, awareness)” of certain conventions by which “a hearer understands the sentence, i.e., knows its meaning, i.e., knows the rules governing its elements” (ibid., 48). The result is a system in which the speaker’s illocutionary intentions are seen as decoded, rather than inferred.

This appeal to convention as a mediating factor between the performance of speech acts and the identification of illocutionary effects takes away much of the flexibility introduced into the speech-act framework by Grice’s inferential theory of communication. While I agree with Searle’s attempt to reduce the Gricean emphasis on the production of beliefs as central to communication, I disagree with his strategy. By replacing Grice’s account with an appeal to decoded illocutionary effects, he closes the door on the tremendous potential unleashed by Grice’s inferential approach. This return towards a code-based theory offers little prospect of further insight into forms of communication such as persuasion that rely heavily on inference and other cognitive processes to produce their intended effects. I would now like to look at how subsequent pragmatic frameworks have developed Grice’s account and moved away from code-based explanations. Relevance theory (Sperber and Wilson, 1986, 1995), in particular, has developed the inferential model of communication within a broader cognitive framework involving several layers of intention, to which I will argue that a full account of persuasion needs to add several more.

3. Intentions and intended cognitive effects

3.1. Bach and Harnish’s inferential approach to speech acts

Bach and Harnish’s (1979) book, *Linguistic Communication and Speech Acts*, is an attempt to bring together Austin’s speech act framework and the

two main elements of Grice's framework, inferential recognition of intentions and the Cooperative Principle. As I will show, the account goes a long way towards answering many of the problems outlined in the previous section.

Bach and Harnish review Austin's work and use much of his speech act framework to underpin their own Speech Act Schema (SAS) by which illocutionary and perlocutionary effects are derived. In so doing, they refine some of Austin's characterizations. They agree with Austin that perlocutionary acts may result in a wide variety of effects on the audience, and necessarily involve a speaker's intention to produce these effects (Bach and Harnish 1979, 17 and 81). Thus, for Bach and Harnish, perlocutionary acts can only be intentional and may cause two types of effects, namely "psychological states or intentional actions" (ibid., 81). Bach and Harnish also show how perlocutionary effects may be linked to hierarchical layers of intentions. Their Speech Act Schema posits several layers of inferential reasoning (L1-n), and shows how perlocutionary effects can result from most layers. Let's illustrate how this layering of intention and inference might work in the case of an advertisement:

Context: An American television commercial features an elderly gentleman (played by a well-liked television star) speaking with an exaggerated British accent.

L1 (phonetic representation): The hearer identifies the speaker's utterance: "We make money the old-fashioned way: we EARN it."

Perlocutionary effect from L1: The speaker's accent instills confidence and respect in the audience.

L2 (sentence meaning): The hearer understands the sentence to mean: "We earn money in a traditional manner, by working hard."

Perlocutionary effect from L2: The use of the words “old-fashioned” and “earn” suggest long-established, traditional principles and values.

L3 (proposition expressed): The hearer infers that the speaker has expressed the proposition that the company makes money the old-fashioned way by earning it.

L4 (speech act): The hearer takes the utterance to be an assertion that the company makes money the old-fashioned way, by earning it.

Perlocutionary effect from L4: The trusted actor’s claim that the company makes money in a responsible way results in some in the audience believing the claim.

Ln: The hearer takes the utterance to be a commercial for an investment bank using a spokesperson to advise potential customers of its business practices.

Perlocutionary effect from Ln: By choosing such a well-liked actor to star in the commercial and having him persuade the audience of its responsible practices, the company causes some in the audience to entrust them with their money.

By considering only perlocutionary effects intended by the speaker, this account abstracts away from further, unintended effects, such as people never being able to see the same actor again without thinking: “He makes money the old-fashioned way, he EARNs it!” (or “He takes money for acting in commercials.”)

It should be clear from this brief outline of Bach and Harnish’s Speech Act Schema that it points in the same direction as my remarks in the previous section about the model of persuasion I shall be proposing in the next few chapters. However, while tying perlocutionary effects to the specific intention they fulfill helps to set the stage for examining the cognitive dimensions of perlocutionary acts, it still does not specify what

types of mechanisms result in these effects beyond the layer (L4) that constitutes understanding. Bach and Harnish argue that a set of mutually recognized social norms and expectations provide a context that facilitates the understanding of speech acts and the identification of the intended effects. One point on which I disagree with Bach and Harnish is that I do not believe that a mutually recognized context in the sense they propose is necessary for comprehension. Following the proposals of relevance theory, I will argue that context does play an important part in understanding, but this context is identified as part of the comprehension process and may go well beyond mutually recognized beliefs, rather than fixed in advance, and may go well beyond mutually recognized beliefs.

The framework I will propose for analyzing persuasion in the next several chapters will exhibit the layered structure outlined in the Speech Act Schema, which links intentions to their effects. However, I aim to go much further in specifying the mechanisms that produce these effects and tying them into broader cognitive and cultural processes. I will examine the nature and structure of intentions and argue that they hold the key to the mechanisms of persuasion. Indeed, Bach and Harnish's schema reflects both the hierarchical structure and the functions of intentions which, when examined within a broader cognitive framework, should yield an adequate account of how perlocutionary effects are produced.

3.2. Gu's transactional approach

Gu's (1993) contribution to the study of perlocutionary acts is the first of a series of several articles that challenge the speech act account of perlocutionary acts and seek to redefine them within different theoretical frameworks. I will discuss another of these contributions, Marcu's (2000) paper in the next section.

Gu (1993) starts by reviewing Austin's (1962) account, Bach and Harnish's (1979) proposals and several other related papers (e.g., Cohen, 1973; Campbell, 1973; Davis, 1980). He offers an interesting analysis of these standard speech act accounts of perlocutionary acts, summarizing their four key assumptions as follows:

- (a) the "Multiplicity Thesis," according to which one perlocutionary act can have multiple effects on multiple persons;
- (b) the "Infinity Thesis," which claims that almost any type of effect can result from a speech act (see Bach and Harnish 1979);
- (c) the "Causation Thesis," according to which the speaker causes some effect on the hearer (see Austin 1962); and
- (d) the "Intention Irrelevance Thesis" according to which intentionality (on the speaker's part) is not necessary for achieving a perlocutionary effect.

Gu's main objection to the standard speech act treatments of perlocutionary acts focuses on the nature of the relationship between the utterance and the perlocutionary effects. More specifically, he argues that they fail to recognize the role of the hearer in the production of perlocutionary effects.

He objects to the Causation Thesis on the ground that perlocutionary effects (e.g., beliefs) cannot be said to be strictly "caused" by the utterance (or the speaker), as there is no necessary causal relationship between an utterance and these effects. This argument is certainly valid if one accepts that for an utterance to literally cause a cognitive effect in the hearer, the hearer would have to surrender control of his mind, so that the effect would be caused either through brainwashing, or by a process that directly inserts the appropriate belief into the hearer's cognitive system. The fact that this does not happen is a reflection of the gap between understanding and

believing. To replace the Causation Thesis, Gu suggests that an utterance might be said to “trigger” an act (mental or physical) on the part of the hearer. In his view, once the Causation Thesis has been abandoned in favor of a “triggering” analysis, the term “perlocutionary act” becomes meaningless and is nothing but a convenient, but erroneous way of aggregating an illocutionary act and its perlocutionary consequences. Instead, Gu suggests that a perlocutionary act should be seen as a transaction involving two separate acts: the speaker’s and the hearer’s. The hearer’s act is best seen as a “mental act.” In Gu’s words:

“Restoration of the addressee to the status of an active agent, and recognition of mental acts lead to the conclusion that the so-called perlocutionary effects are not in fact caused by S, but actively produced by H, who has the claim to the agency of the effect ... (the perlocutionary act) is a joint endeavor between S and H. It involves S’s performance of speech acts and H’s performance of response acts.” (Gu, 1993, 422)

This analysis is in line with the theoretical framework, conversational rhetoric, within which Gu positions his account of persuasion. The advantage of this framework, according to Gu (1993, 428-429), is that, by focusing on transactions between the speaker and the hearer, it allows an account of both participants’ non-communicative goals. While I agree with Gu that the hearer’s goals contribute to successful persuasion, this certainly does not require that persuasion be accounted for in a conversational perspective. Indeed, inferential approaches to communication from Grice onwards rely on coordination between the speaker and hearer in the process of inferential intention recognition. Recognizing the role of the hearer does not require communication to be examined in a conversational or

transactional perspective: even if we follow Gu in stipulating that the hearer himself performs a mental act in response to an utterance, this hardly has to constitute a conversational move on his part. In fact, some of the most visible instances of persuasion are found in clearly non-conversational settings such as marketing, political spin or propaganda, and certainly do not require a conversational or transactional exchange to take place.

Gu contributes to the search for a better account of persuasion by focusing attention away from issues of causation and the illocutionary/perlocutionary distinction, and directing it towards the role of the hearer in the fulfillment of a perlocutionary act. The nature or extent of the hearer's contribution, whether it is a change in attitude (e.g., belief or desire), the adoption of an intention (which I shall characterize in this thesis as different from attitude change), or the performance of an action, is one of the puzzles of persuasion which this thesis addresses. Although it is clear that most communication requires some cognitive work by the hearer along lines intended or expected by the speaker, successful persuasion seems, intuitively at least, to require greater involvement or additional work by the hearer. While I do not share Gu's opinion that a transactional framework captures the hearer's active contribution to the success of an act of persuasion, I agree with him that the hearer's contribution must be further examined.

3.3. Marcu on persuasion beyond speech acts

A more recent article by Marcu (2000) broadens the examination of perlocutionary acts beyond any of the contributions discussed above. As we shall see, his approach shows some similarities with mine in that he seeks to use other disciplines, such as social psychology, most particularly in providing empirical data instead of what he terms "cooked-up laboratory examples" (ibid., 1722). He thus attempts to widen the domain of

investigation to include forms of persuasion involving more than the production of simple utterances: for instance, the use of complex persuasive strategies described by social psychologists. One such strategy is the use of inoculation for persuasive purposes, as described by McGuire (e.g., 1970).

Inoculation is used in social psychology in the same way as it is in medicine, as a way to boost an individual's resistance against attacks from foreign agents (e.g., viral, communicative, or cultural). For instance, a teenager's natural resistance to strong peer pressure to start smoking can be reinforced by exposing him to carefully measured pro-smoking stimuli that enable him to develop his own arguments against smoking and his techniques for resistance. Being able to account for such strategies in the same framework as simple persuasive utterances is indeed an important goal. However, Marcu's framework differs substantially from the one I propose here, as he analyzes persuasion within a formal theory based on situation calculus. I will review only the first part of his paper, which provides an insightful review and critique of the standard speech act treatment of persuasion.

Marcu attributes the failure of speech act accounts of persuasion to seven "fallacies" of speech act theory, outlined below:

- (a) "The fallacy of considering perlocutionary acts to be consequences of simple locutionary acts" (Marcu, 2000, 1722). Marcu's point here is that a persuasive act can take almost any form. Simple imperatives, such as "Don't smoke!" may not be persuasive enough on their own, and a communicator's intention to persuade must rely on more complex strategies, such as inoculation. I agree with Marcu, and I attempt in this thesis to provide a framework that encompasses a broad range of persuasive strategies. An account of

persuasion that focuses on the intention to persuade offers the clear advantage of supporting the full range of strategies.

(b) “The fallacy that “new” information is needed in order to produce perlocutionary effects” (ibid., 1724). Marcu’s point is that, because they failed to account for perlocutionary effects beyond belief, previous speech act analyses could only consider perlocutionary acts that provide the hearer with new information. In other words, these analyses failed to recognize the perlocutionary effects of confirmatory evidence. I agree with Marcu that persuasion involves effects beyond the production of beliefs, and that successful persuasion can result from further confirmation of assumptions already held by the audience. As we shall see, relevance theory accounts for this by allowing assumptions to be strengthened (or weakened) as new evidence becomes available (Sperber and Wilson, 1986, 1995, 75-81). Beliefs are held more or less strongly, and both the acquisition of new information and the confirmation of existing assumptions can add to our understanding of the world. In the framework I will be proposing, I allow for perlocutionary (cognitive) effects that go beyond the strengthening of beliefs and result in changes in attitudes and intentions. Once it is accepted that persuasive effects can result from any form of communication, it follows that a stimulus that simply strengthens existing assumptions, for instance, can result in persuasive effects.

(c) “The fallacy of attaching little or no importance to the role of the hearer in the perlocutionary act” (ibid., 1726). One of the weaknesses of the accounts of perlocutionary effects reviewed in this chapter is their lack of attention to the cognitive processes in

the hearer that result in persuasive effects. While existing accounts recognize that persuasion is not the sole responsibility of the speaker, little attempt has been made by pragmatists to clarify the hearer's contribution, since this is seen as falling outside the domain of communication. This is clearly an area in which the methods of cognitive psychology and social psychology can play a key role.

- (d) "The fallacy of assuming the hearer to be a "rational" agent" (ibid., 1727). This point is linked to the previous one. As noted above, standard speech act treatments of persuasion did not attempt to understand any of the cognitive or other processes involved in the hearer being persuaded. The result is an incomplete account of perlocutionary acts and their effects. Marcu treats cases in which the communicator's intentions are not recognized, or the speaker does not understand the message, as showing that the hearer may be less-than-rational. In our discussion of social psychology accounts of persuasion in Chapter 3, we will examine some very common and effective strategies by which the hearer may be persuaded without understanding the arguments or realizing that he is being persuaded. I will argue that these strategies do rely on the hearer's rationality, albeit bounded rationality, an adaptive form of rationality that allows for efficient shortcuts or rules of thumb to be used under appropriate circumstances.
- (e) "The fallacy of attaching little or no importance to the role of the speaker in the perlocutionary act" (ibid., 1727). This general criticism is again deserved by most of the frameworks we have examined so far. Marcu's point is that the hearer's perception of

the speaker's "credibility" and "attractiveness" contributes to perlocutionary effects. Certainly, existing speech act treatments focus on the speaker more than they do on the hearer, but I agree with Marcu that they fail to take into account the hearer's perception of the speaker as a further clue that either reinforces, or diminishes perlocutionary effects. Given that the hearer must recognize the speaker's intentions in order for communication to be successful, as has been accepted since Grice, a more comprehensive account of communication (persuasive communication, *a fortiori*) must account for the use of contextual information about the speaker to guide the hearer to adequately recognize the speaker's intentions.

- (f) "The dismissal of the role played by the structure of locutions in the success of perlocutionary acts" (ibid., 1728). Here, Marcu suggests that rhetorical arguments and strategies have been overlooked in speech act and pragmatic accounts of persuasion. This point is linked to the first fallacy identified by Marcu in (a) above. As one looks beyond the role of simple locutions in persuasion, more emphasis needs to be placed on the structure of the persuasive argument or strategy adopted. In the course of the thesis, I will discuss a range of persuasive tactics which have been used extensively by professionals whose job it is to persuade (Cialdini, 1993, 2001). The framework I propose for persuasion will accommodate some of these tactics which owe their effectiveness, as I will show, not just to rhetoric, but, more crucially, to the mechanisms of practical reasoning, cultural transmission and cultural evolution.

(g) “The fallacy of considering speech acts to be the basic units of communication” (ibid., 1730). Marcu suggests that the use of certain communicative devices such as metaphors, or qualitative rather than quantitative qualifiers (e.g., “virtually always” rather than “99%”) is particularly persuasive. His point is that such “persuasive techniques apply at levels that are much more finely grained than speech acts” (ibid., 1730). He cites a number of studies, most conducted by social psychologists, which he sees as indicating that certain lexical forms or styles are more or less persuasive. My main objection to his conclusion is that, as no definition, and certainly no measure, of persuasiveness has ever been widely agreed upon, one can hardly purport to measure persuasiveness. As a result, the cited studies cannot claim to have identified which element of an utterance is more or less persuasive. However, I share Marcu’s opinion that because speech act theory is not the right discipline in which to study persuasion, thinking of persuasive stimuli as speech acts yields few worthwhile results.

As noted above, I agree with most of Marcu’s arguments for looking beyond the speech act approach to persuasion. He suggests that we approach persuasion in a much broader perspective and this is what I plan to do. The framework he himself proposes, a formal theory based on situation calculus, is beyond the scope of this thesis and I will not review it, although it may well yield some worthwhile conclusions. The solution I propose to many of the problems identified here lies in a theoretical framework which fits more naturally with social psychology as it shares some of its cognitive underpinnings, relevance theory.

4. Relevance Theory

My review of previous work on perlocutionary acts, and specifically persuasion, has highlighted three main questions:

- (a) How are different layers or levels of intentions linked to different layers of effects, e.g., those characteristic of persuasion?
- (b) What effects characterize successful persuasion? Do these effects go beyond the production of beliefs, and if so, how?
- (c) How is successful persuasion possible when the speaker cannot rely on the hearer's cooperation, and often has interests that are at odds with the hearer's?

I have suggested throughout this chapter that I see relevance theory as providing a useful framework in which to answer some of these questions. In this section, I will introduce the main elements of relevance theory (Sperber and Wilson, 1986, 1995) and show how it can provide a bridge between the communicative and cognitive dimensions of persuasion.

4.1. Two levels of intentions – two types of effects.

In their 1986 volume, *Relevance*, the 1995 postface to the 2nd edition of *Relevance*, and numerous articles published over the past 20 years⁴, Sperber and Wilson have developed a theory of communication with broad implications for our understanding of cognition and related disciplines. The theory, while sharing Grice's inference-based perspective on communication, also departs from his account in significant ways. Because it has broad implications in several fields, there are a number of ways to approach relevance theory. I will begin by addressing one of the

important issues raised in this chapter: how to distinguish belief production from understanding in such a way as to account for cases (e.g., those discussed in Section 1), in which there can be understanding without belief, and those in which further perlocutionary effects can be created in the absence of belief.

The key to the relevance-theoretic treatment of these problems is the distinction it draws between an informative intention and a communicative intention. Let's now examine the treatment of these two levels of intentions in relevance theory.

Apart from placing a speaker's intentions at the very center of overt communication, Grice's (1957) definition of meaning suggested that overt communication involves at least two levels of intention. These two intentions were:

“A must intend to induce by x a belief in an audience, and he must also intend his utterance to be recognized as so intended...” (Grice, 1989, 219)

As noted at the beginning of this chapter, while a communicator's intentions include having the audience believe her, this aspect of her intentions is not always fulfilled. The audience may well understand what the communicator meant to communicate (what she intended for the audience to believe), but form an attitude to it that falls short of belief. This attitude could be anything from total disbelief, to questioning, or to acceptance with doubt. Which attitude the hearer forms within that range depends on how much he trusts the speaker, and on what evidence he takes the speaker to have for the claim being made. So, the audience can recognize some of the communicator's intentions, and thus understand her,

⁴ See bibliography for all references.

without these intentions being fulfilled. In summary, the audience may recognize:

- (a) that the communicator intended to inform them of something,
- (b) that the communicator intended them to recognize the intention in (a).

However, (a) may not be fulfilled because the audience does not believe what the communicator is intending to inform them of. To use the relevance theoretic terms: (a) is the communicator's informative intention, and (b) is her communicative intention. Importantly, it is possible for intention (a) to be recognized (i.e., for the audience to understand what the communicator meant), without being fulfilled (because the audience does not believe what it is told).

Here are the relevance-theoretic definitions of the informative and the communicative intentions:

“Informative intention: the intention to inform the audience of something.” (Wilson and Sperber, 2002, 255)

“Communicative intention: the intention to inform the audience of one's informative intention.” (ibid.)

Intending to inform an audience of something amounts to intending for the audience to believe something. If the audience recognizes the informative intention, but does not form the appropriate belief, the speaker cannot be said to have successfully informed the audience, but the audience can still be said to understand the utterance and recognize that the speaker wanted them to believe what she intended to convey.

Let's examine an example in the form of a simple business case study.

- (8) Phase 1: A new deli opens in the business district of a big city. It offers a large selection of made-to-order sandwiches throughout the day, and hopes to capture business from existing delis in the area that have resorted, in order to accommodate the rush of lunch-hour orders, to making batches of a smaller range of sandwiches in the morning, and offering them "ready-to-go" at lunch time. The owner of the new deli is committed to his strategy of offering only freshly made sandwiches, but realizes that he can only compete if he can fill each customer's order within five minutes. He hires enough part-time staff to ensure that he can actually keep to this level of service. When a customer places an order, he receives a computer-generated ticket showing the order number and the time at which the order was placed, and he is told that his order will be ready within five minutes. The owner's intention is to build his clientele via word-of-mouth. Satisfied customers who receive their fresh, made-to-order sandwich within five minutes of ordering, tell their friends and colleagues about the new deli and spread the word. When the order takes longer to fill than five minutes, staff members have been trained to inform the customer that their sandwich is "on the house" because it was delivered late.
- (9) Phase 2: Three months after launching the deli, the owner assesses his business and realizes that, as good as business has been, his overhead costs are high because he has kept an extra employee or two on hand at lunchtime to ensure that he can always deal with a sudden rush of customers. While word-of-

mouth has served him well, he decides that he needs to publicize his strategy of “five minutes or it’s on the house” in order to attract more customers. He orders a large number of flyers with this information to be distributed to neighborhood offices, and puts a large signs in the deli that reads: “Your fresh made-to-order sandwich in five minutes, or it’s on the house.”

Here is a relevance theoretic analysis of this case:

- (a) Owner’s informative intention (present in phases 1 and 2): to inform customers that made-to-order sandwiches are delivered in five minutes or offered at no charge.
- (b) Owner’s communicative intention (present in phase 2 only): to inform customers of his intention to inform them that made-to-order sandwiches are delivered in five minutes, or offered at no charge.

In phase 1, the owner’s marketing strategy does not include a communicative intention, as he does not yet want to make his offer of a free sandwich overtly known by drawing attention to it. It is important to note, however, that the owner does indeed have an informative intention: he wants customers to be informed that sandwiches not delivered in five minutes are free. Examining the owner’s higher-order intentions helps to clarify this position. Because his marketing strategy (in phase 1) is to use word-of-mouth, giving away free sandwiches is more than a gesture of goodwill, it is intended to inform customers that there is an offer “on the table.” While he intends to inform his customers of this offer, the owner relies on the customers to infer the information from their own

observations⁵ that orders are delivered in five minutes, or free, and for this information to be spread via word-of-mouth. He is not yet ready to draw customers' attention to his intention to inform them of the offer. Let's see why.

As long as the owner hasn't drawn his customers' attention to his intention to inform them of his offer, he hasn't fully committed to the offer, and can still renege on it if necessary. In phase 1, the owner has not taken on any overtly expressed commitment to give out free sandwiches: there is no guarantee that he will do so. In phase 2, however, if the owner wanted to renege on his offer, having made his informative intention overt, thereby guaranteeing a five-minute turnaround, he would have to pretend that the flyers were printed without his knowledge, in other words, that he was not responsible for their distribution or content. His decision, in phase 1, to allow the audience to infer his offer leaves it open for him to change his mind if the five-minute target becomes too onerous. Those customers who, having observed how the deli operates, note that sandwiches are delivered in less than five minutes, and that orders that are not filled within five minutes are given free, might well reach the conclusion that this is the owner's intended strategy, but cannot call on him to stand behind it (for instance, with the Advertising Standards Agency), as he has not communicated it overtly. Others might simply fail to notice the regularity of the service, or to infer that it is intended. Those that do recognize that the owner expects them to notice the regularity of service are in fact recognizing the informative intention. Having found the regularity of the service noteworthy and either received a free sandwich or known of someone who did, they have inferred that the owner intends to make his customers aware that they can rely on a five-minute turnaround or receive a

⁵ As we will see in the next section, the observation and conclusion would be guided by the customer's search for relevance.

free sandwich. If enough trust is established, they may also believe that the owner is committed to this standard, and thus fulfill his informative intention. This would have been achieved without the owner having to overtly communicate his commitment to the offer.

However, there is a more reliable way for the owner to ensure that his informative intention is fulfilled: he may inform the customers of his informative intention by drawing attention to it, and this is what he does in phase 2. When he prints his offer on the flyers, he overtly communicates that he is undertaking a commitment. If a customer receives a flyer and understands that it offers a service guarantee, he has recognized the informative intention (thus fulfilling the communicative intention). If he also believes the guarantee, he has fulfilled the owner's informative intention. The informative intention remains the same in both cases, regardless of whether it is backed by a communicative intention. The additional dimension added by the owner's communicative intention in phase 2, is that it increases the likelihood that customers will believe the guarantee of good service, and thus purchase from the new deli.

While the inferences involved in recognizing the two types of intentions may appear in this analysis to take place sequentially and to require complex, effortful reasoning, in fact they do not. These inferential processes are seen in relevance theory as carried out by a specialized comprehension module that operates in a "fast and frugal" (Gigerenzer and Todd, 1999 a) and efficient way (this point will be discussed further below).

I've now shown how relevance theory distinguishes between understanding and believing. Understanding involves the fulfillment of a communicative intention. The central claim is that the communicative intention may be fulfilled (i.e. the informative intention recognized), without the informative intention being fulfilled (i.e. the assumptions the

speaker intended the audience to believe are not in fact believed). The informative intention itself is fulfilled only if the hearer believes the assumptions which the speaker intended him to believe. The factors influencing the fulfillment of the informative intention lie outside the scope of pragmatics proper, but may be approached in the broader cognitive framework provided, which claims that human cognition is relevance-oriented.

4.2. Relevance and cognitive effects

My discussion of relevance theory so far has focused on a communicator's intentions and the effects of an utterance on an audience without considering how the intended effects are derived, or what their nature might be. We saw earlier in this chapter that in many accounts, convention and cooperation have been seen as central factors in the recognition of a speaker's meaning: I argued that both these factors are inadequate to deal with the full range of cases. Sperber and Wilson (1986, 1995) propose that expectations of relevance are a key element in human communication and comprehension. The hearer's recovery of the speaker's intended meaning is guided by the expectation that the utterance will be relevant to him. Apart from being intuitively appealing when understood in terms of a commonsense notion of relevance, this approach makes an important claim about communication when understood in terms of the theoretical notion of relevance proposed in relevance theory. This basic theoretical notion is defined in cost-benefit terms, the benefits being (positive) cognitive effects, and the costs, the processing effort required to achieve these effects.

Relevance theory treats all cognitive inputs (sights, sounds, utterances, memories, conclusions to inferences) as potentially relevant. What makes an input relevant to an individual at a certain time is the fact that it interacts

with information he has available to yield worthwhile conclusions: e.g., by confirming an existing belief, revising it, or combining with it to yield a range of implications. Such worthwhile conclusions are known as positive cognitive effects⁶. Other things being equal, the greater the positive cognitive effects, the greater the relevance. For example, the information that a friend has woken up early in the morning may have some implications (and hence some relevance) for me, but the information that a friend has recovered from a coma has many more.

A second factor in the theoretical definition of relevance is the notion of processing effort required to construct a representation of the input (e.g., the utterance), construct a context of mentally-represented assumptions, and compute the cognitive effects produced by adding the input to the context. Other things being equal, the smaller the processing required, the greater the relevance of the input. For example, the information that a friend has recovered from a coma has a huge range of implications in a context of assumptions that are easily retrieved. By contrast, the information that someone I have never met has recovered from a coma would seem less relevant because it would be harder to construct a context in which it would have many implications for me.

According to relevance theory, the whole of human cognition is relevance-oriented. That is, we have evolved in such a way that our

⁶ In the 1st edition of *Relevance* (1986, chapter 2, section 7, fn. 26), Sperber and Wilson give a formal account of contextual effects (to be referred to in later writings as cognitive effects in a context):

“Let C be a context and P a set of new premises. Let *Conclusions of P* be the set of conclusions deducible from P alone, *Conclusions of C* the set of conclusions deducible from C alone, and *Conclusions of $P \cup C$* the set of conclusions deducible from the union of P and C . Let two assumptions with the same content but with different strengths count as two different assumptions. Then the contextualisation of P in C has no contextual effect if and only if the two following conditions are met:

- (i) *Conclusions of C* is a subset of *Conclusions of $P \cup C$* .
- (ii) The complement of *Conclusions of C* with respect to *Conclusions of $P \cup C$* is a subset of *Conclusions of P* .

perceptual systems are geared to picking out the most relevant sights, sounds, and other inputs. Our memories are geared to retrieving the background assumptions that provide the most useful contexts in which to process these inputs, and our inferential systems are geared to deriving the most productive implications as efficiently as possible. It is against this relevance-oriented cognitive background that overt communication takes place.

In relevance-theoretic terms, overt communication involves the production of an ostensive stimulus (e.g., an utterance, a gesture, an advertisement) designed to attract the audience's attention and focus it on the communicator's meaning. Within this framework, an audience will only attend to a communicator in the expectation of receiving some relevant information. This brings us back to the expectation of relevance, introduced at the beginning of this section as the central factor in overt communication. How is this to be characterized? According to relevance theory, the hearer is entitled to expect the utterance (or other ostensive stimulus) to be at least relevant enough to be worth processing, and moreover, the most relevant one the speaker could have used given her own abilities and preferences. An utterance that satisfies these expectations is optimally relevant. As Sperber and Wilson put it, an "ostensive stimulus conveys a presumption of its own optimal relevance." (Wilson and Sperber, 2002, 256). This is the communicative principle of relevance. In the case of the deli opening discussed in Section 4.1, while some customers' own cognitive search for relevance may have led them to conclude that the owner's strategy was to deliver sandwiches in five minutes, it is the ostensive act of distributing flyers that raises sufficient expectations of relevance and focuses the customers' attention on the deli owner's guarantee.

We've seen that relevance is a potential feature not only of communicative stimuli, but more generally of all inputs to cognitive processes. This is particularly important in the context of this thesis, as it allows us to think of the cognitive effects that are derived beyond the understanding of a persuasive stimulus as governed by the same type of search for relevance as the comprehension process itself. According to the more general cognitive principle of relevance, "human cognition tends to be geared to the maximization of relevance" (Wilson and Sperber, 2002, 254). As we develop the notion of intention and analyze the role of intentions in persuasion, we will discuss in later chapters how the search for relevance guides the practical reasoning processes that lead from understanding to intention and action.

4.3. Comprehension

Having discussed communication from the speaker's point of view, let's now examine how relevance theory accounts for the process of comprehension and the effects of communication on an audience. According to relevance theory, an utterance encodes a logical form, or sentence meaning, that provides a clue to the speaker's meaning. The goal of pragmatics is to explain how the hearer bridges the gap between sentence meaning and speaker's meaning.

This first stage of comprehension is the only one in which ostensive communication relies on decoding⁷. Once decoding has been completed, inferential processes take over. These processes are guided, as discussed in the previous section, by the expectations of relevance. Specifically, relevance theory claims that hearers can identify the speaker's meaning using the following comprehension procedure:

“Relevance theoretic comprehension procedure:

Follow a path of least effort in computing cognitive effects: test interpretive hypotheses (disambiguations, reference resolutions, implicatures, etc.) in order of accessibility. Stop when your expectations of relevance are satisfied.” (e.g., Wilson and Sperber, 2002, 259)

This comprehension procedure makes specific claims about the steps by which a hearer can identify a speaker’s meaning. His goal is to find enough implications (or other cognitive effects) to satisfy the particular expectation of relevance raised by the utterance. His method is to take the most accessible disambiguations, reference assignments, contextual assumptions, etc., and see whether the resulting interpretation yields enough implications to satisfy his particular expectation of relevance (e.g., by answering a question he has just asked.) If so, he stops and assumes that this is what the speaker meant; if not he continues his search by looking for further contextual assumptions or alternative disambiguations until he does find a satisfactory interpretation.

In more general cognitive terms, this comprehension procedure can be thought of as a mind-reading process whose aim is to attribute a particular type of mental state to the speaker. Specifically, as we’ve shown in this section, the audience’s goal in applying the comprehension procedure is to recognize the speaker’s informative intention. Recognizing a speaker’s informative and communicative intentions has long been thought to be a straightforward application of general mind-reading abilities to the particular case of communication. However, more recent work in relevance

⁷ When there is no verbal ostensive stimulus, as in phase 1 of the deli case, there is clearly no code to help decipher the stimulus, and the audience must rely on inferential processes

theory, based partly on developments in cognitive psychology, has suggested that the comprehension procedure may have evolved as a separate, dedicated module (e.g. Wilson and Sperber, 2002, 276), a “fast and frugal” (Gigerenzer and Todd, 1999 a), highly efficient heuristic process. More generally, relevance theory is heavily committed to the view that human cognition consists of a mass of (largely evolved) relevance-theoretic heuristic processes designed to yield positive cognitive effects in the most efficient way. I will argue that successful persuasion often involves the exploitation of such relevance-oriented heuristic processes. In the next section, I will look at some strategies that sophisticated hearers might use to protect themselves from exploitation by deceptive speakers, thus separating understanding from believing.

4.4. Strategies of understanding

Relevance theory appeals to the idea that cognitive resources are used in communication, and that cognitive benefits are gained. On the production end, the speaker’s willingness to expend mental effort in producing an utterance is based on her assumption that she will succeed in conveying her meaning to the hearer and perhaps achieving some ulterior goals. To ensure that this is the case, she should aim at optimal relevance, as argued above. On the comprehension end, the hearer’s willingness to expend processing effort depends on his anticipation of a certain level of relevance to come, in the form of positive cognitive effects. However, the presumption of relevance is not always satisfied as understanding proceeds. The speaker may have tried but failed to be optimally relevant, or she may, deceptively, have tried only to seem optimally relevant (for example, she may be lying).

working directly on the representation of the perceived stimulus.

Communication works smoothly when optimal relevance is not only promised, but also achieved; failures or deceptions may be costly for one or the other interlocutor. We saw in section 1.2 above, and I will discuss at much greater length in Chapters 4 and 5, how communication typically involves participants with diverging agendas beyond the point at which uptake is secured. For this reason, sophisticated individuals develop strategies that enable them to treat communicative stimuli with a degree of skepticism appropriate to their view of the speaker's reliability and to the stakes involved in a given transaction.

Sperber (1994 a) and Wilson (1999) describe three such strategies of understanding, each involving a more sophisticated expectation of relevance. A "naïvely optimistic" hearer accepts the first interpretation that seems optimally relevant to him and assumes that this is the one intended by the speaker. In this case, he is likely to believe the speaker. A "cautiously optimistic" hearer is able to cope with cases where the speaker accidentally produces an utterance that is not optimally relevant: he identifies the speaker's intended meaning by thinking about how she might have intended her utterance to be optimally relevant to him. Finally, a hearer using a strategy of "sophisticated understanding" may be able to cope with outright deception and to understand the speaker's meaning without actually believing her. (One does not normally trust a speaker who is recognized as deceptive.)

Each of these strategies requires an extra layer of representational ability. A naïvely optimistic hearer assumes that each utterance actually will be optimally relevant to him. A cautiously optimistic hearer assumes that the speaker thinks her utterance is optimally relevant to him. A hearer with sophisticated understanding assumes that the speaker will think he will think the utterance is optimally relevant to him. Thus, coping with deceptive speakers requires a substantial amount of mind-reading ability.

Clearly this ability develops during childhood and clearly, most adult speakers are capable at least of this. Thus distinguishing understanding from believing goes hand in hand with the development of sophisticated mind-reading abilities.

Having now reviewed a number of possible pragmatic frameworks in which to develop our account of persuasion, we find that relevance theory offers a promising avenue for investigating the full range of cognitive effects derived by an audience, and intended by a communicator, including perlocutionary effects. While the comprehension process is guided by expectations of relevance, the derivation of further effects is governed by the more general cognitive principle of relevance according to which “human cognition tends to be geared to the maximization of relevance,” (e.g., Wilson and Sperber, 2002, 254). Because these further effects go beyond those involved in the identification of the speaker’s meaning, the presumption of relevance alone cannot account for them. However, according to the cognitive principle of relevance, other cognitive tasks such as practical reasoning, or the rational planning of actions are also governed by the search for relevance. Competent persuasive communicators must be able to take advantage of the relevance-oriented heuristic processes by making their persuasive stimuli relevant enough for audiences not only to understand (under the communicative principle), but also to accept as the basis for changes in their attitudes, intentions and, possibly, behavior (under the cognitive principle). As a greater challenge, these persuasive stimuli must be effective in spite of the fact that the audience’s interests are often at odds with the communicator’s. How is all this to be achieved?

5. Persuasion: from information to beliefs to actions

5.1. Acquiring information and forming beliefs

Our knowledge of the world and the beliefs we form about it are acquired in three ways (Sperber, 2000 a, 2001; Cosmides and Tooby, 2000). We perceive the world directly, learn about it from others, and may infer further assumptions from previously acquired ones. Assumptions derived by perception are highly credible, but are sometimes costly to collect as they may require resources and mobility; they may be also be subject to illusions. Assumptions acquired from others have one very strong advantage: they are quite cost-efficient as they require only the ability to understand. However, they cannot always be taken at face value as their sources may themselves have misperceived them, have been misinformed, or may be attempting to misinform or deceive us. Inferred assumptions are also problematic in that they may be derived incorrectly (using flawed procedures), they may be based on erroneous premises, or they may be applied in the wrong situation (Cosmides and Tooby, 2000). Because of their cost-efficiency, the vast majority of our assumptions are acquired through communication (Sperber, 2001).

Typically, communication involves the construction by the audience of a metarepresentation (a representation of a representation) (Sperber, 2000 a). So, for example, my mother's assertion that carrots give you rosy cheeks might be represented in my mind, at least initially, as (10) rather than (11):

(10) Mom wants me to believe that carrots give you rosy cheeks.

(where the representation "carrots give you rosy cheeks" is embedded in the representation "Mom wants me to believe x").

(11) Carrots give you rosy cheeks.

Without the intermediate stage of processing in (10), which allows us to assess the speaker's trustworthiness, we would come to believe everything we are told, and use potentially erroneous information to derive further representations. In this case, not only might I believe that carrots will give me rosy cheeks, but I might conclude that eating certain foods can change the color of one's skin. The inferential step from (10) to (11) depends on what I have learned about my mother's "tricks" to get me to eat vegetables, or about the relationship between eating a certain vegetable and the color of my cheeks, or on whether I should always believe my mother. It may also be revised in the light of future information on similar issues. Let's say that because mother has previously told me that soup makes you grow taller, I have come to doubt the truthfulness of her claims about foods I dislike. Then, the representation "carrots give you rosy cheeks" will probably never be disembedded from my metarepresentation of mother's intention in (10): it will never be "disquoted" or accepted as a belief of mine. It can, however, be used as a piece of evidence of mother's "tricks," and can be quite useful as such.

Similarly, Sperber (1996, 71-73) discusses the case of "half-understood information" which should not be disquoted until the information is fully understood. So, for example, after overhearing his parents discuss politics, a child might have a representation such as "Mom and Dad think that the anti-missile program is utterly ludicrous," without really understanding what "the anti-missile program" is. Only after learning a lot more about world affairs and defense policies would he be able to have the mental representation "the anti-missile program is utterly ludicrous" disquoted from its original source, and form a belief about the actual anti-missile program itself. Having the metarepresentation, however, enables him to retain the information, and because he acquired it from a trustworthy source, he will be able to use it "as if" he understood it. Clearly, such cases

are not limited to children; half-understood information is frequently repeated by adults as if it were true, either because they place sufficient trust in the source, or because they wish to appear as if they did understand it fully. I will come back to this concept of half-understood information and the risks and problems associated with it.

In general, however, much of the information we acquire from others is well understood and credible. In such cases, it is likely to be disembedded as soon as it is understood. Because it is quite costly to remember whom we got it from, the source of the information is sometimes lost. Most of what we learned as children, for instance, is stored as knowledge with no reference to the original source from which we acquired it. It is impossible for most adults to remember whether they learned that the earth is round from their parents, a teacher, an older sibling or a picture book.

5.2. From affecting beliefs to influencing behavior

Communication, we've seen, allows the hearer to form beliefs in a way that permits him to reap the benefits of new information and to gain from others' experience of the world, while attending to his own interests and preserving his own beliefs. For hearers, there is an inherent tension between the goal of acquiring new information, with all its benefits, and the risk of accepting information that is false. A similar tension exists for communicators between benevolently sharing their own beliefs with others, and the opportunity for manipulating the beliefs of others to their own ends. In short, both interlocutors stand to benefit from communication as long as they can use it to their advantage by "staying a step ahead" of the other.

From an evolutionary perspective, the very function of communication, to give or receive information, offers the possibility of manipulation (Dawkins and Krebs, 1978; Krebs and Dawkins, 1984; Sperber, 2000 a, 2001). Communication evolves as a fitness-enhancing tool for cognitive systems:

by entering into communication, cognitive systems achieve self-beneficial effects on other cognitive systems, and by receiving information, cognitive systems also avail themselves of self-beneficial effects, provided that they are able to filter out detrimental information.

If we were to examine the layers of higher-order intentions in which the communicative and informative intentions are embedded, we might expect to find the intention to alter the audience's behavior. Altering a target's attitude is often a first step towards achieving a specific goal of altering the target's behavior without engaging in coercion. One of my two main claims in this thesis is that persuasion involves a specific intention on the part of the communicator to alter the audience's behavior. There are several arguments for this claim. In the first place, if communication is capable of affecting the behavior of others, why shouldn't communicators use this fact to their own advantage, and form their intentions accordingly? We'll see that this is indeed the case. We'll review evidence that individuals (a) know how to use language persuasively to get others to engage in specific behaviors, (b) use specific strategies to do so, (c) are often aware of their use of these strategies, (d) become better at these strategies as they use them more, and (e) reap great rewards from being able to do so. To believe that the ultimate goal of persuasion is anything less than this (for instance to believe that it simply affects attitudes) is to underestimate the power of communication and, more generally, human social intelligence.

However, while individuals share an obvious need to influence others, not all of our communications are directly designed to affect the behavior of others. So, there is a clear difference between communicating to be understood and believed, and communicating to persuade, i.e. to change others' behavior. Underlying this difference, I will argue, is the communicator's intention to persuade. The second main claim of this

thesis is that the hearer's own structure of intentions and actions is targeted by the communicator in a persuasion attempt.

How, and to what extent, the communicator's persuasive intention can affect the audience's behavior, and how the audience, in turn, deals with the persuasive intention, are important questions. Distinguishing intended from unintended effects is a difficult task which often leaves both "naïve" communicators and communication researchers frustrated. It is also a gray area that is easily exploitable by persuasive communicators seeking to affect their audiences without necessarily having to own up to their intention to do so. This is often the case in marketing, business negotiations, and also in everyday casual interactions. As noted in the introduction, I believe that persuasion can and should be defined by the fact that the communicator holds a persuasive intention. I will, of course, be defending this view in more detail, but will need to lay adequate foundations in order to do so. The most important element of my account is the notion of intention. Intentions are mental representations with specific characteristics which play a critical role in making persuasion work, as I will show. Because the role and functions of intentions are complex, I will devote the next full chapter to discussing the nature of intentions and their role in persuasion.

There is an obvious objection to my claim that persuasion involves the intention to affect the behavior of others: we often use the verb "persuade" simply to mean "convince," or "cause to believe." In fact, those are the first meanings listed in the Oxford English Dictionary. The second meaning is "induce to," which clearly involves the causation of a specific action. My response to this objection is that, while neither "convince" nor "cause to believe" specifically require an effect on behavior, they involve a commitment that is plausibly strong enough to result in the performance of a related action. So, for instance, if I have been persuaded that fox-hunting

should be banned, this is a cause to which I am now committed. I can plausibly be expected to speak out against fox-hunting when I can, to vote against it if given a chance, to tell people who hunt foxes that they should stop. If I fail to engage in any of these behaviors, it is at least reasonable to claim that I have not been properly persuaded and the individual who sought to persuade me has failed. So, while I recognize that an act of persuasion does not necessarily lead to action, I believe that it does necessarily involve the formation of an intention to act (at least if the circumstances are appropriate). On this account, not all acts of communication are persuasive, because not all acts are designed to create an intention to act.

6. Conclusion

The speech act account of perlocutionary acts enabled us to look beyond the conventional meaning of utterances (and other communicative stimuli) to the broader range of cognitive effects they can achieve: beyond understanding to believing what has been communicated. As we reduced the role of convention, intentions took on greater importance in the frameworks we reviewed. By linking the recognition of the communicator's intentions with the effects that she aims to produce on the audience, we begin to see how these effects may be derived. As the communicator's layers of intentions lead to the production of ostensive stimuli from which the audience derives corresponding layers of cognitive effects, the expectation of relevance guides the audience towards the speaker's meaning. Beyond this comprehension stage, the audience, whose goals are to use communication in their best interests, may choose to adopt a skeptical attitude in which ulterior motives are suspected. A persuasive communicator, while not necessarily attempting deception, seeks to further

her own agenda and to produce cognitive effects that can result in the audience undertaking specific actions. Having laid the theoretical foundations for understanding the communicative aspect of these complex mechanisms, we will continue to explore how these two parallel scenarios unfold, and how the interlocutors' intentions work with and in spite of each other.

CHAPTER TWO

BEYOND COMMUNICATIVE INTENTIONS

1. Introduction

Relevance theory discusses two levels of intentions in human communication: the informative intention and the communicative intention (Sperber and Wilson, 1986, 1995). A communicator's informative intention is to make a certain set of assumptions manifest to her audience. Her communicative intention is to make the informative intention mutually manifest to her audience and herself. So, for instance, the passenger in a car who points at a set of traffic lights may intend to inform her companion, the driver, that the lights are about to turn red, and her communicative intention is to make it clear to her audience that she intends to inform him of this fact.

Clearly, when engaging in any communicative act, a communicator's desires or goals go beyond these two intentions. For instance, she may want to get the driver to slow down. More generally, she may wish to distract the hearer, to amuse him, to chastise him, warn him of something, persuade him to do something, or achieve any of an indefinite range of goals or combinations of goals. Sometimes these goals or desires relate to events or situations which we would like to see take effect without performing any specific action to bring them about. At other times, we may take steps to achieve a certain goal, and one way of doing this is to

form a communicative intention that results in an utterance, the intended effects of which may help achieve the goal.

In this second set of instances, I will argue that the communicative act is actually caused (in a theoretically appropriate sense which I will discuss) by an intention to achieve the given goal. On the other hand, when the desire to achieve a given communicative goal is simply part of the background and plays no causal role in the production of the utterance, I will argue that no full-fledged intention to achieve the goal is present. Here is an illustration of the difference between the two types of cases:

- (1) Context: First day of a new school year. Father says to child:
“You’re not going to need your teddy bear to help you read this year, are you?”
- (2) Father’s description of (1): I persuaded her to leave her teddy bear at home by asking her whether she needed her teddy bear to help her read.
- (3) More detailed reading of (1), as described in (2): The father intended to persuade the child to leave her teddy bear at home and got her to do so by asking her whether she needed her teddy bear to help her read. Motivated by her desire to start reading, the child chose to leave the teddy bear at home.
- (4) Alternative reading of (1): The father intended to persuade the child to start reading on her own. He asked her whether she needed her teddy bear to help her read. She ended up leaving her teddy bear at home, something the father had wanted her

to do for a long time.

Utterance (1), the effects of which are described in (2), might reflect the two different sets of the father's intentions described in readings (3) and (4). In reading (3), the intention to persuade the child to leave the bear behind (roughly, "I intend to persuade her to leave the bear home. In order to persuade her, I call on her desire to learn to read") plays a causal role in the production of an utterance aimed at getting the child to believe that she can read without her teddy bear. In (4), while the same outcome satisfies the father's desire that the child leave the teddy bear at home, it is another intention, to get the child to start reading on her own, that triggers his formation of the communicative and informative intentions, the production of (1) and the desirable outcome. As a matter of fact, in (4), while it is desirable that the child leave the teddy bear at home, it is only so to the extent that it doesn't jeopardize the primary intention to get her to read alone. In other words, the desire to get the child to leave the teddy bear behind would be abandoned altogether if it interfered with the goal of getting her to read. Notice that while the two outcomes in (4) (leaving the bear home and reading alone) are compatible, they are independent of each other. In both readings (3) and (4), the father might have considered other means of fulfilling his intentions: in (3), other means of persuading the child to leave the teddy bear home (by bribing her, or appealing to the example of her best friend who doesn't have a teddy bear); in (4), other means of getting her to read alone (again, by bribing her, or appealing to her desire for greater independence).

A similar distinction between full-fledged intentions and desirable goals can be made in analyzing non-communicative actions. Here is an illustration:

- (5) The US invaded Iraq wanting to get rid of weapons of mass destruction (WMD).

Under the “intention” reading of (5), the invasion of Iraq was planned and carried out with the intention of getting rid of the WMD, and because of the commitment to this intention. Under this first reading, had other opportunities to get rid of WMD offered a better chance of success, they would have been pursued instead. Under the second reading of (5), getting rid of WMD is a desirable outcome rather than a full-fledged intention which plays a causal role in the invasion of Iraq. While it is possible, under this second reading, that certain aspects of the invasion might have been modified in order to improve the chances of getting rid of WMD, the action of invading Iraq was caused by another overriding and unstated intention. Indeed, to identify the reason for the invasion, we need to understand whether the goal of getting rid of WMD was accompanied by a commitment to act, or was simply a desire¹. In Bratman’s planning theory, which I will introduce in detail below, the key difference between desires and intentions is that desires are “potential influencers” of action, whereas intentions are “conduct-controlling” (Bratman, 1987, 16). This distinction entails further important differences in terms of rationality, which will also become apparent as we further develop the framework. In our example, because invading a country is an act that must presumably be the result of a full-fledged intention rather than a mere desire, if getting rid of WMD was not the underlying intention, there must be another intention that remains

¹ Bratman (1987, 137) introduces a further distinction between a “desire” and a “guiding desire” which leads one to “endeavor.” He relates “endeavoring” to the volitional aspect of intentions which I will discuss in section 3.2 of this chapter. One of the characteristics of endeavoring is that “other things equal, I will be prepared to make adjustments in what I am doing in response to indications of my success or failure...” (ibid., 129). I will use the term

covert. In a way, by failing to make explicit the intention behind the act, the agent's commitment to and responsibility for the action can be blurred. In this example, our reading of the reasons for the invasion varies according to whether we assume the intention or desire reading of the statement.

In addition to the communicator holding a distinct persuasive intention (as in (1) and (2)), persuasive communication is also characterized, as argued at the end of Chapter 1, by a specific intended effect on the audience. This effect is for the audience to perform a given action, or as a prerequisite, to find it desirable to perform this action and adopt the corresponding intention. In other words, persuasive communication is characterized by both the communicator's persuasive intention, and the intention that the audience is intended (by the communicator) to adopt as a result of the persuasive stimulus she produces.

The fact that intentions play an important role for both the communicator and the audience in an act of persuasive communication, is by no means coincidental, as I will now show. It is a result of the nature and functions of intentions. In his book, *Intentions, plans and practical reasoning* (1987), the philosopher Michael Bratman analyzes the nature of intentions, and their role in practical reasoning. While Bratman does not discuss the role of intentions in communication, his account of their more general role in cognition provides a useful basis for a study of intentions in communication, and in particular, in persuasive communication.

"desire" here as the distinction between intentions and desires is sufficient for the framework I am proposing.

2. Beliefs, desires and intentions

Humans are planning agents, according to Bratman (1987). Planning enables us to organize our actions over time and to coordinate them with those of other agents. Plans are hierarchical structures, the elements of which are intentions. As intentions are fulfilled, we proceed step by step towards the eventual fulfillment of our plans. So, if furthering my education and pursuing academic achievement are among my highest-order plans, completing a PhD is a plan of a slightly lower-order, followed roughly, in descending order, by my intention to write a thesis, my intention to write this chapter, my immediate intention to finish this section by 3:00 this afternoon, and so on. As I complete each step, I give myself the means to reach the next step. The mental processes that allow me to work through these steps and to ensure that my actions contribute to achieving my overall goals constitute practical reasoning, in Bratman's terms. Practical reasoning involves the consideration of how best to reach certain ends, and plays an important part in Bratman's planning theory. I will now discuss it in greater detail as I outline Bratman's framework and show how it relates to persuasion.

In order for the planning process to work, there must be constraints on how intentions fit into the planning hierarchy. In Bratman's terms, each intentional step must be taken in such a way that it is "means-end coherent": in other words, it must be regarded as a coherent means to achieving an end in the intentional structure. For example, in order to write a thesis on persuasion, I intend to propose a theoretical framework in which to better understand the role of intentions in communication; I intend to write this chapter to introduce and discuss such a framework. My beliefs and desires function as an "admissibility filter" in this process. As I

consider possible courses of action to reach my goal, the optional actions under consideration must be screened through the “filter” of my beliefs and attitudes (Bratman, 1987, 33). If my intention is to obtain a book from the library, and I believe that the library, which is on campus, is holding the book on reserve for me through the end of the day, I should form the intention to go to campus today instead of tomorrow. Similarly, in the utterance described in (1) above, in order to fulfill his informative intention to suggest to the child that she doesn’t need the bear’s help, the father must form a communicative intention to have his informative intention recognized. Forming this communicative intention is the best way of achieving his informative intention. I will come back to this practical reasoning process, and to the filtering role played by desires and beliefs in this process in the next section.

Intentions and desires, often called pro-attitudes in philosophy and psychology (e.g. Davidson, 1980, Astington, 2001), represent potential states of affairs whose existence the individual finds desirable. Pro-attitudes are representations of state of affairs that might be, whereas beliefs are attitudes about the way certain states of affairs are. However, intentions differ from desires in that they require a commitment to action: they are “conduct-controlling,” according to Bratman. It is because of this commitment that intentions are reliable enough to enable us to organize our own actions over time and to coordinate them with those of others. Intentions therefore play a central role in this planning theory of agency. In order to fulfill this organizing and coordinating function, they must be relatively stable and resistant to change, and should also be internally coherent and consistent with our beliefs and desires.

Intentions can play a coordinating and organizing role because they are hierarchically organized and pose problems of “means-end incoherence” to

which solutions must be found, either through opportunity or necessity. Such solutions are then examined for admissibility within the existing framework of intentions, beliefs and desires. For example, I have a general intention to organize our next vacation. Structurally, this intention is part of a wider plan to balance work and leisure in my life, and would branch out into more specific intentions such as finding a destination, booking a holiday, taking time off from work and budgeting the cost of the trip. While I am committed to going on this vacation (it is more than a desire), it is currently means-end incoherent: that is, were I to do nothing further about it, the goal of being on an airplane on my way to a holiday on February 15 would not be achievable. As I get closer to the date, this incoherence must be resolved either opportunistically if an option presents itself (I happen to hear about a great deal to the Caribbean), or by necessity (I finally decide to actively seek out options by spending a morning researching different trips on the internet). The options under consideration must be filtered through other attitudes: my desire for warm weather, financial considerations and the like. As my intentions gradually develop, all the intermediate actions that allow the end goal to be reached (purchasing tickets, traveling to the airport, getting on the plane) will need to be considered and integrated into the overall plan, committed to and fulfilled.

2.1. Features of intentions

Because of their temporal and interpersonal coordination functions, intentions must exhibit specific characteristics that set them apart as a category of mental states distinct from desires and beliefs in Bratman's framework. One of these features is their stability. Once an intention has been formed, it has inherent "inertia" which limits the possibility of

reconsidering it, (subject to certain norms of practical rationality). As rational agents with limited cognitive resources, we develop certain sets of habits or dispositions geared to maximizing the efficiency of our reasoning processes. Such dispositions, once formed, help us identify with minimal effort those situations in which reconsideration of an intention may be warranted, and assess the various costs and benefits associated with such reconsideration before it is carried out. This inertia makes intentions a sound basis on which to build further intentions and achieve temporal or interpersonal coordination. Without such stable habits or dispositions, we might waste both time and cognitive resources reconsidering every step of our plans, regardless of the rationality of such reevaluation.

Another feature of intentions which Bratman singles out is that they act both as inputs to and as outputs of practical reasoning. Bratman suggests a detailed account of how an input intention (one that has been formed by the agent and has achieved stability) provides a rationale for the development of further (i.e., “output”) intentions within the framework of the agent’s desires and beliefs. I will use this account to model the practical reasoning process as applied to communication, and in particular to the relations between the persuasive intentions, the communicative intentions and the informative intention, and to the particular sub-intentions involved in choosing how to formulate an utterance so that all three intentions are achieved. Persuasive intentions, pose means-end coherence problems the solution to which is found, through practical reasoning, in the formation of the appropriate informative and communicative intentions which themselves result in the production of the utterance, along the lines detailed in relevance theory.

Finally, intentions, in Bratman’s planning theory, are characteristically “conduct-controlling.” How intentions, desires and beliefs are linked to

actions has long been a subject of concern for philosophers. Philosophers such as Davidson (1980) defend the view that our desires and beliefs are the reasons for our actions, and, more specifically, that they cause our actions. I will discuss the “reasons as causes” account of actions in section 3.1 below. Bratman, as we’ll see, rejects this view of reasons “exerting a ghostly mode of influence on later action” (Bratman, 1987, 108). Instead, he sees the relation between intention and the commitment to act as the key to a satisfactory account.

2.2. Commitment in practical reasoning

Bratman’s notion of commitment is developed within a framework of bounded rationality (Simon, 1955; Gigerenzer and Selten, 2001). “Bounded rationality,” a term first used by Herbert Simon (1955), describes the process of practical reasoning under restrictions of time and cognitive resources. Under such restrictions, humans take advantage of regularities in the environment in which they function and in the information which they process, to develop habits, dispositions, or norms which tend to increase their efficiency. I shall discuss bounded rationality and the associated heuristic strategies in much greater detail in the next several chapters. Commitment, according to Bratman, is linked to one such set of dispositions and internalized norms which operates more or less effortfully, automatically or consciously to relate our intentions to our actions. The advantage of such an arrangement is clear. By committing now to going to the library tomorrow, I am efficient in two ways: I make it possible to coordinate my visit to the library with my other activities and those of others around me, and I save myself the time and effort of having to reason again tomorrow that I must go to the library to pick up a book. So, rather than seeing desires and beliefs as causing our actions, Bratman sees our

rational commitment to carry out our intentions (themselves consistent with desires and beliefs) as causing our actions. This is Bratman's view of how bounded rationality may constrain the practical reasoning processes that start with desires and beliefs and end in the performance of actions.

According to Bratman, commitment has both a descriptive and a normative aspect. The descriptive aspect has to do with the role that commitment plays in producing actions, while the normative aspect relates to the role that commitment ought to play in the conduct of our lives if we are to attain satisfaction in the long term. Under its descriptive aspect, commitment has two dimensions, it is part volitional and part "reasoning-centered" (ibid., 16). The volitional dimension explains the immediate control exerted by an intention over an action at the time that the action is to be undertaken: my intention to engage in an action is sufficient for me to "endeavor" (or "at least try") (Bratman 1987, 108) to perform the action at the appropriate time. It is the volitional aspect of my commitment which makes me stretch my arm out to open the front door, take a first step out of the door, walk out onto the street and get on the underground to travel to the library when the time comes to perform each of these steps. The "reasoning-centered" dimension of commitment explains the roles played by intentions over time, from their formation to the performance of the intended action. It is because I need the book for my research that I placed it on reserve, and will pick it up tomorrow when it is available.

The normative aspect of commitment consists of the rational "norms and standards" (ibid., 109) that affect my reasoning and my action. Here, Bratman distinguishes between internal and external norms of rationality. As we engage in practical reasoning, we consider certain options for future action. Internal norms of rationality have to do with the "admissibility" of these options as they come under consideration, and include means-end

coherence, consistency and inertia (discussed above in Section 2.1). If I am committed to going to the library tomorrow, I can use this commitment to rationally form the intention to meet a friend on campus and commit to doing so. “External” norms of rationality are external in the sense that they are accessible to an outside observer: they are not constrained by the agent’s “admissibility filter” (her desires and beliefs), but are conditions on when it is generally rational for an agent to deliberate or reconsider intentions and/or plans. Suppose that I bought theater tickets several weeks ago for tomorrow night, but failed to record this plan in my diary, and now accept an invitation to travel to Paris tomorrow for several days. Based on my belief that I have no previous commitment for tomorrow (i.e., my own admissibility filter), my intention to go to Paris is rational. However, anyone who knows of my two conflicting commitments and is therefore unconstrained by my admissibility filter could accuse me of irrationality. So, my behavior was rational according to my internal norms of rationality, but not according to external norms.

Bratman’s characterization of commitment as part volitional and part reasoning-centered is intuitively very appealing. As we will see in the brief outline of his own account of intentionality below (3.1), Davidson objects to any volitional element in intentions, seeing it as an appeal to a “mysterious act of the will” (Davidson, 1980, 87). In my view, there is nothing “mysterious” or “ghostly” about Bratman’s proposal, however: while my own practical reasoning makes this commitment rational (both internally and externally), I can at any point reconsider my intentions if this reconsideration is compatible with my internal norms, and form a different commitment. If my child becomes ill, my internal norms trigger reconsideration of my visit to the library, and my desires and beliefs (admissibility filter) justify my abandoning the intended trip to the library

and staying home. Bratman's account of commitment suggests an altogether credible, but, unsurprisingly, very complex set of attitudes and reasoning processes which are seen as working together to explain the important coordination function of intentions, both temporally, and interpersonally. In this way, he manages to "demystify commitment without allowing it to collapse into mere desire and expectation." (Bratman 1987, 110).

2.3. Practical reasoning and deliberation

Having introduced many of the elements of Bratman's account of practical reasoning in the context of his planning theory, I will now consider the process of practical reasoning itself. In general terms, we've seen that Bratman treats practical reasoning as ultimately guided by an individual's attempt to reach long-term rational desire satisfaction. Along the way, rational desire satisfaction requires the fulfillment of plans, which itself requires the formation of lower-order intentions and their fulfillment through the performance of intended actions. As we have seen, one of the important features which distinguishes intentions from desires and beliefs is their role as inputs and outputs of practical reasoning. As inputs, higher-order intentions "pose a problem", since they require one to choose between several courses of action, providing different methods of fulfilling them. These options are screened against the admissibility filter created by existing desires and beliefs, as well as existing intentions. The output of this deliberative process is the selection of one course of action and the formation of a new intention with its associated commitment. It is the cognitive work behind this planning structure and its fulfillment which Bratman terms practical reasoning. Built into this cognitive work are many mechanisms that ensure efficient processing and take advantage of

environmental and informational regularities by creating what Bratman calls habits, dispositions and norms (and what others have called heuristics, cf. Gigerenzer and Selten, 2001). Such mechanisms are clearly very much in line with relevance theory which gives a central role to intention and treats cognition in general from a bounded rationality perspective.

When embedded in a dynamic and interactive context, this massive planning structure becomes more complex. Not only do intentions themselves “pose problems,” but external events and pressures affect our intentions by raising and solving further problems. Here again, practical reasoning is facilitated by mechanisms geared to achieving cognitive efficiency. As noted above, intentions are inherently stable across time and will not be reconsidered unless the options generated by external pressures have properties that make both the reconsideration and its outcome potentially beneficial. While Bratman spends some time discussing what makes reconsideration rational, and how the resulting deliberation are constrained both by the admissibility filter and by habits, dispositions and norms, he does not discuss the nature of these external pressures and how they might be exerted. This is obviously an issue of great interest in the study of communication since it is through communication that individuals gain information about each other’s mental states and attempt to modify them.

The first point worth focusing on in discussing these external pressures is whether they themselves are intentionally exerted or not. Once identified as intentional, such an externally presented option might then be analyzed in terms of the wider network of intentions and plans of the other agent, and thus further screened for evidence of cooperation, manipulation, etc. For instance, it is possible to imagine a manipulative scenario in which one agent tricks the built-in efficiency mechanisms of another into “letting

through,” or not tagging for further deliberation, an externally presented option which might not be the most beneficial, the most “desire satisfying” for that other agent in the long term.

While Bratman’s planning theory provides an important part of the foundation for my account of persuasion, I’ll briefly explore some other perspectives on the role of intentions in action: some of these might be seen as complementing Bratman’s work, while others offer alternative answers to consider in setting up the framework.

3. From desires and beliefs to action

3.1. Reasons and actions

In his well-known essay on “Actions, Reasons and Causes” (1963, 1980), Donald Davidson argues that intentional actions are bodily motions caused by “the onset” of a certain state of mind, namely a pro-attitude, combined with a set of related beliefs, which together constitute both the reasons for action, and the causes of action. Pro-attitudes are “desires, wantings, urges, promptings... public and private goals and values in so far as these can be interpreted as attitudes of an agent directed toward actions of a certain kind,” (1980, 3-4). The type of belief that would constitute a reason for action would be a belief that the action to be undertaken can indeed result in satisfying the pro-attitude. At least in Davidson’s earlier work, there is no need for a mental state such as an intention to intervene between, on the one hand, the desire for a certain outcome, together with the belief that this outcome can be achieved by undertaking a certain action, and, on the other hand, the action itself, (as there is, of course, in Bratman’s work). A pro-attitude combined with a belief directly causes an action (a bodily movement), in Davidson’s view. In later work, Davidson became

more amenable to the idea of intermediary intentions (see, for instance Pacherie, 2000, 2002). In particular, by acknowledging the need for a distinction between “future intentions” and “intentions in action,” Davidson ended up, in effect, accepting the role of intentions as separate mental states.

According to Davidson (1980), an action can be described as intentional or unintentional depending on whether it is seen “under one description” or another. The illustration he uses involves an agent reaching for the salt-shaker at the dinner table and knocking down a wine glass. This constitutes only one bodily movement of the arm extending, caused by a desire for the food to be saltier and the belief that adding salt will fulfill this desire. The reason for undertaking the intentional action of extending the arm is to fulfill the agent’s desire for saltier food by adding salt. “Under one description,” (Davidson, 1963, 1980, 4-5) this action is an intentional reaching for the salt, while under another description, the same bodily motion is an unintentional knocking down of the wine glass. All three events, extending the arm, reaching for the salt and knocking down the glass constitute one and the same action, “under different descriptions.”

While pro-attitudes clearly encompass some notion of desire or will (Bratman, for instance, sees commitment as having a volitional dimension), we saw earlier that Davidson strongly rejects the idea that a “mysterious act of the will” (Davidson, 1980, 87) can be the reason or cause of an action. In an attempt to remove any mystery from the reasons for an action, in some of his later work, Davidson characterizes pro-attitudes as premises roughly of the form, “any act of mine would be desirable insofar as it is an act of making the food saltier.” Together with my beliefs that adding salt will make the food saltier and that by reaching out I can add salt, this premise yields an “all-out evaluative conclusion” (Bratman, 1999, 212) that

reaching for the salt is desirable, the acceptance of which is my reaching for the salt.

If we are to apply this form of practical reasoning to the intentional production of utterances, intentions themselves must be able to function as inputs to this type of reasoning in order for our informative intentions to give rise to the communicative intentions that may lead to their fulfillment.

3.2. The volitionist account of intentions

In contrast to Davidson's theory, the volitionist account argues that an act of "will", which might be represented by the statement "I will that I perform this action," (cf. Grice, 1971, 277), intervenes between desires and beliefs, on the one hand, and action, on the other. This act (or state) of will is a "primitive element of animal consciousness" (O'Shaughnessy, 1980) that "has the power of producing the bodily movements it represents" (G. Wilson, 2002). In other words, it is not one's desires and beliefs that cause one to act, but rather, one's "primitive" will. Volitionists reject what they see as a lack of choice inherent in Davidson's account of action: if one is actually caused to act by one's beliefs and desires, one has no free choice. In response to Davidson, volitionists argue that willing is a state of mind antecedent to action, which enables us to choose "in the light of" (rather than caused by) our desire and beliefs (Lowe, 2000, 252), between actions, or between action and non-action. Volitionists support their claim by comparing successful with unsuccessful actions. An act of will takes place regardless of whether the action is successfully performed or not, so that "willing that one perform an action" is the "common element" between successful and unsuccessful actions (Lowe, 2000, 247). For example, I may "will that" I communicate my appreciation of the scenery, but find myself unable to produce a sound upon opening my mouth, and therefore

fail to perform the action. The link between one's desires and beliefs and one's actions is indeed the will to act, the common element in successful and unsuccessful actions, argue the volitionists. What this framework leaves unresolved is how to account for the rationality of willing a certain action given one's volitional states and beliefs.

We saw in Section 2 that Bratman's (1987) theory of planning clarifies and redefines this debate between the volitionists and Davidson by bringing in a new element. The critical new element offered by Bratman is the existence of intentions as a state of mind in their own right, distinct from beliefs and desires, but derived from them through practical reasoning and with the additional feature of commitment to action that I have described. Bratman claims to shed new light on the "reasons as causes" debate by shifting attention away from actions to intentions and their functions. Crucially, Bratman sees intentions and the more complex plans they constitute as carrying a commitment to action; and commitment is what reconciles the two conflicting accounts of action. Desires and beliefs do lead to action, according to Bratman, albeit through practical reasoning, planning and the commitment to action that is characteristic of intentions.

3.3. The self-referentiality of intentions

Searle (1983, 85) argues that intentions can only be satisfied if they cause the actions they describe. This is sometimes referred to as the causal self-referentiality requirement on intentions. Put another way, the descriptive content of an intention to raise my arm "must be at least (that I perform the action of raising my arm by way of carrying out this intention)," (Searle, 1983, 85) where the intention must play a causal role in producing the action. He illustrates this requirement with a well-known example of what he calls a "deviant causal chain" (Searle, 1983, 136). A man intends to kill

his uncle. While he is busy planning the details of the murder, his intention makes him so upset that he develops a stomach ache. The stomach ache in turn makes him so angry that he is driven to murder the next man he sees, who happens to be his uncle. The uncle's death is clearly accidental and does not fulfill the man's intention because it was not caused by the intention itself. The uncle's death, however, does fulfill the man's desire to see his uncle dead. Here, the intention to kill the uncle does not play a causal role in carrying out the murder. The causal chain that should lead from the intention to the action that fulfills the intention, is deviant, or broken.

We can apply this distinction to example (5) above which I'll repeat here for convenience:

(5) The US invaded Iraq wanting to get rid of WMD.

If we interpret (5) as ascribing an intention and agree that the US invaded Iraq with the intention of getting rid of WMD, the fact that no WMD were found in Iraq makes the intention unfulfilled as it did not lead to the removal of the WMD. The actions that were carried out in order to fulfill the intention can be deemed a failure. If the reading of (5) is that finding WMD was among a list of desired outcomes, but did not constitute the intention behind the invasion, the success of the action is not compromised by the failure to find WMD. Apart from illustrating the difference between desires and intentions based on the causal self-referentiality of intentions, this example also serves to further illustrate the importance of properly assigning intentions vs. desires to agents, both in communicative situations, and in general cases of intentionality as in this example. "Under which description" the US saw itself invading Iraq is all-important here.

4. Detecting intentions

As we've just seen, philosophers and cognitive psychologists interested in a better understanding of intentions and intentionality differ in how they articulate the role and status of intentions within a belief-desire framework. Some additional insight may be gained from looking at recent work on how children develop the ability to read others' intentions, and how adults recognize intentions. By examining intentions from the point of view of cognitive psychologists and bringing some of their empirical evidence to bear, I want to further solidify the theoretical framework on which I am basing my account of persuasion, and to emphasize the link between the philosophical and the cognitive accounts of intentions.

4.1. The development of intention-detection

Recent research in developmental psychology has been influenced to some extent by the philosophical ideas discussed in Sections 2 and 3. It suggests that very young infants detect both desires and intentions, and gradually refine their ability to differentiate intentions from desires as their metarepresentational capacity develops. While the child's ability to attribute desires and goals is well known, the development of an intention-reading ability in children has only been seriously investigated in the last decade.

Astington (2001) argues that the causal self-referential property of intentions helps children distinguish them from desires. Moreover, the detection of causal self-referentiality requires a metarepresentational ability: in this case, the ability to represent either one's own or someone else's intentions as the causes of actions. In Astington's words, "the child has to understand that action to achieve the goal must be caused by some

internal representation of it” (Astington, 2001, 94). It might be thought, if this is so, that children should be unable to differentiate intentions from desires until they have developed a “theory of mind.” Typically, children are credited with a “theory of mind” when they are able to pass a “false-belief” test by attributing to someone else a belief that they know to be false, and predicting that individual’s action on the basis of their false belief. For instance, to pass a standard false-belief test, a child must recognize that someone who left a ball in a box and did not see it moved should look for the ball in the box where she left it, not in the place where it is now. This ability is normally seen as developing between the ages of 3 and 4 (cf. Wimmer and Perner, 1983).

While there has been a great deal of recent research on the development of “intentions,” most of the experiments conducted have failed to take into account the causal self-referentiality of intentions. As a result, they have failed to distinguish properly between desires and intentions. Astington (2001) and Schult (2002) point out that the critical flaw in these experiments is that subjects can appear to be detecting intentions simply by matching a desire, or goal to its successful outcome. In fact, Astington argues, because an intention must actually cause the intended action in order to be successful, many experiments on “intention detection” are inadequate because they have failed to test for the subject’s recognition of the causal relation between intentions and actions.

While a young child may well recognize that someone’s desire matches a desirable outcome, she cannot recognize intentions *per se* unless she understands that intentions cause the actions that result in their outcomes. Astington’s hypothesis is that only after they are able to pass a false-belief test, thus showing evidence of “theory of mind” (metarepresentational understanding), do children have the competence to distinguish desires

from intentions. Before this, she speculates, they may detect something like “desire-intention,” or “conation” that conflates both attitudes. One area in which young children’s ability to infer some form of intentionality has been shown is in the domain of lexical acquisition. Work by Baldwin (e.g., 2000) and Bloom (e.g., 2002), among others, indicates that children learn the “names for things” (Bloom, 2002) by using clues such as the direction of an adult’s gaze to infer what object the adult “intends” to refer to.

Astington discusses some of this evidence (2001, 91-92) and suggests that these may be cases of conation attribution. Further work on action parsing by Baldwin and Baird (Baldwin and Baird, 2001; Baird and Baldwin, 2001) which I will discuss in the next section, also suggests that the detection of intentional action in young infants is a bottom-up mechanism that does not involve the metarepresentation of an intention or its content. Astington calls for further developmental research to test for the ability to distinguish between desires and intentions before and after the development of metarepresentational ability.

Schult (2002) reports some of this research and provides further evidence for Astington’s hypothesis by showing that young children (4 and 5 years) who competently detect desires cannot yet differentiate them from intention, whereas older children (7 years), who have developed full metarepresentational understanding, are able to make the distinction. In a first study, children are told stories involving characters with both a desire and an intention about a certain end state or goal. Each story concludes with one of the four possible combinations of fulfillment or non-fulfillment to a desire or an intention, as follows:

- (a) desire fulfilled/intention fulfilled: A character, getting ready to swim, wants to get wet all at once and plans to do so by jumping off

the diving board. She successfully fulfills her intention to jump off and her desire to get wet all at once.

- (b) desire unfulfilled/intention fulfilled: A child preparing her snack decides to set out the milk and crackers she wants to eat. She fulfills her intention by pouring herself a glass of milk and taking out the crackers, but her dad comes in and eats her crackers while she is putting the milk away, leaving her desire unfulfilled.
- (c) desire fulfilled/intention unfulfilled: A child wants a particular doll and plans to purchase it from the toy store. Before she does so, her mother fulfills her desire, but not her intention, by giving her the doll.
- (d) desire unfulfilled/intention unfulfilled: A child wants to build a snowman and plans on rolling up all the snow in his yard, but finds the snow has melted away while he went into the house to put on his snowsuit, thus leaving both desire and intention unfulfilled.

After being told each of the stories, the children are asked to describe the character's "plan" and desire, and whether each is satisfied. While this study reveals some understanding of the distinction between desires and intentions among both 4 and 5-year olds and 7-year olds, the younger the children, the more confusion they showed about the link between intentions and actions, and the less consistent they were in recognizing whether intentions were fulfilled.

Schult's second study is designed to test a younger set of children (3 years old) by presenting situations in which the desires and the intentions

are more independent of each other, and in which the subjects themselves are the agents. Subjects are asked to toss small beanbags into any one of a row of colored buckets. Some of the buckets (unidentified to the subjects) contain prizes necessary to “win the game.” Before each toss, the child is asked to identify which bucket she will try to hit (intention) in order to try to collect a prize (desire). Again, four outcomes are possible for each toss (intended bucket hit/desired prize collected, intended bucket hit/no prize collected, intended bucket missed/prize collected, intended bucket missed/no prize collected). The subjects are made to toss until they have achieved each of the possible outcomes three times. After each toss, the children are asked which bucket they were trying to hit. In other words, having established before the action both their desire (to collect a prize), and their intention (the bucket which they indicated they would aim for), subjects are asked, after performing the action, which bucket they had been aiming for. The hypothesis is that in cases in which the desire, but not the intention is fulfilled (i.e., the intended bucket is missed, but the bucket with the prize is hit accidentally, and a prize is won), some children may restate their intention as having been to hit the bucket that turned out to have the prize, rather than to hit the bucket which turned out to be empty. Such children would be seen as using the outcome-desire matching strategy in doing so, rather than recognizing that their initial intention was not fulfilled while their desire was. The hypothesis was indeed confirmed: all of the younger children (3-year olds) misidentified their intentions under the circumstances just described.

Although Astington (2001) expresses some uncertainty with the results and calls for further investigation, the overall pattern is clear and suggests that previous studies of intentionality in children have missed a critical distinction between detecting desires and detecting intentions. These

studies provide evidence that rather than being different points on a continuum of pro-attitudes, desire and intentions constitute different types of attitudes that play different roles in cognition and in communication.

In the same vein, Moses (2001) argues that previous research claiming to show that children exhibit understanding of intentions before being able to pass false-belief tests failed to properly distinguish intentions from more general desires. Moses identifies the three critical aspects of intentions: motivation (“the appreciation of desires and their link to actions” (ibid., 71)), causality (i.e. causal self-referentiality) and belief, and suggests that pre-school children should be evaluated for their ability to entertain these three notions. The motivational aspect of intentions, clearly a key aspect of intentions, is probably the earliest to develop, according to Moses. He also argues that causal self-referentiality and the epistemic aspect of intentions require the ability to represent false belief. More specifically, the epistemic aspect of intentions has to do with the intending agent’s belief that she is indeed able to perform the intended action. To hold this type of belief requires the ability to entertain false beliefs, according to Moses, since understanding that an intention may be unfulfilled requires the ability to entertain at least one false belief. If a child is told that she can receive a treat by hitting the right bucket with a ball and believes that she can indeed hit the right bucket, she must be able to entertain the possibility that she might miss the bucket. In other words, Moses claims, she must be able to entertain something akin to a false belief.

Moses reviews evidence from studies he performed with 3-year olds who were also given false-belief tests which they generally failed, but who did indeed grasp the motivational features of intentions, and showed some understanding of the notion of unfulfilled goals. He concludes that children of that age may entertain general pro-attitudes in which desires and

intentions are somewhat undifferentiated, a conclusion that is very much along the same lines as Astington's (2001) and Schult's (2002).

The developmental work reviewed here does lend sound support to Bratman's framework, specifically the important distinction between desires and intentions, the volitional (or motivational) and reason-centered (or epistemic) dimensions of intentions and the causal self-referentiality of intentions. We will see in Chapter 4 that these important elements of Bratman's framework contribute in significant ways to the account of persuasion I am proposing.

4.2. Other experimental work on intention detection

Work with adults on their detection of intentions and their ability to distinguish between intentions and desires also yields results suggesting that intentions are a different type of mental state from desires. Baird and Baldwin (2001) provide evidence that both adult and infant perceivers parse actions into "intention-relevant" units using a "bottom-up" process. This suggests that the ability to detect certain structures of intentional action is different from the "top-down" ability to infer the metarepresentational content of the underlying intention. For example, adult subjects watching a video of an agent performing sequences of actions show great consistency in their ability to identify the end-points of each of the actions, thus indicating that they parse a series of actions into individual intentional actions. Similarly, 10 to 11-month old infants react with greater interest to videos in which an intentional action is interrupted than to videos in which the interruptions occur between distinct, sequential actions.

Baird and Baldwin (*ibid.*) suggest that the two mechanisms responsible for intentional action detection and intention-inferencing might well develop sequentially in young infants, while they might operate

independently, but in parallel in adults. This view is very much in line with Astington's (2001) claim that the development of intentions may take place in two stages: first, conation and then, full-fledged intentions including metarepresentation, and with Moses' (2001) claim that a concept of belief is necessary for young children to fully differentiate desires from intentions. These perspectives differ markedly from the one taken by "direct perception" proponents who argue that infants "see" intentions in the behaviors they observe (cf. Baldwin and Baird, 2001). Both the developmental and the adult data presented in the several studies just discussed seem to support the two-level account.

Malle and Knobe (2001) illustrate the type of inferential process that adults might use to distinguish between desires and intentions. They argue that adults can distinguish between desires and intentions based on three specific features of pro-attitudes: their action content, the degree of commitment they involve and whether the pro-attitude functions as an input or an output to a simple practical reasoning process.

The first claim is that naïve perceivers do not attribute an intention unless the agent of the action to be performed is the same as the intender. By this criterion, "I intend to leave" would be acceptable, and "I intend Bill to leave" would not². This is based on a statement often found in the literature, that the content of an intention is usually an action that is to be either performed or controlled by the intending agent herself. Malle and Knobe provide evidence for this claim by showing that out of a sample of 110 occurrences of the verb "intend" in a database of newspaper articles, 97% are followed by an infinitive construction, indicating that the action is

² I'll come back to this distinction in Chapter 4, Section 4.3 in the more specific context of the persuasive and informative intentions.

to be performed by the subject of the verb “intend” (Malle and Knobe, 2001, 48).

The second claim is that naïve perceivers distinguish between intention and desire by inference to the degree of commitment shown by the agent to performing the action. High commitment, as noted by Bratman (1987) and others, is associated with intention rather than desire.

The third claim is more controversial: it is that perceivers associate inputs to practical reasoning processes with desires, and outputs from practical reasoning with intentions. This does not fit with Bratman’s analysis (discussed above) of intentions as contributing both as inputs to and as outputs from practical reasoning. Malle and Knobe recognize this as a problem, but argue nonetheless that “social perceivers” tend to perceive inputs to reasoning as desires, and outputs as intentions.

The experiments designed to test these three hypotheses are sentence-completion tasks, in which adult subjects are asked to select from among a range of verbs (“want,” “hope,” “need,” “intend,” “plan,” and “decide”), the one that they think best represents the pro-attitude held by the subject of each sentence. The first three verbs listed are categorized by the researchers as representing a desire, while the last three are categorized as representing an intention:

Here is an illustration of the sentence-completion tasks proposed:

- (6) “I am serious, I ---- you to be back by midnight.” (Testing for action content).
- (7) “Sarah ---- to go to a Thai restaurant perhaps, or pretty much any Asian cuisine.” (Testing for commitment).
- (8) In her dire financial situation, Beth ---- to make a lot of money

fast... so she ---- to buy high-risk stock.” (Testing for input/output role in reasoning).

The data, as expected, confirm the first two hypotheses. Naïve perceivers do indeed attribute a desire rather than an intention when the subject of the main clause is not the agent of the proposed action, and when the agent of the pro-attitude does not exhibit high commitment. Results for the third hypothesis, as might be expected, are less clear. While subjects clearly treat outputs of practical reasoning processes as intentions, they do not seem to regularly distinguish between intentions and desires based on their role as inputs to practical reasoning.

In general, my goal in reviewing both the developmental and experimental evidence was to provide some empirical support for Bratman’s (1987) planning theory, the framework on which I will base much of my account of persuasion. The evidence supports the view that there is an important distinction to be made between desires and full-fledged intentions. Children seem to develop the ability to detect the former first, and then the latter. The key skill required to make this distinction is the ability to metarepresent a pro-attitude as one that does indeed cause the intended action, thus confirming the causal self-referentiality of intentions. Furthermore, social perceivers seem to distinguish between the two types of pro-attitudes primarily based on the degree of commitment involved, and the fact that one cannot intend something that one cannot control.

As the work discussed in these two sections shows, Bratman’s theory has been widely used as the theoretical basis for much empirical work performed in both the developmental and the social intelligence fields. It thus provides a useful bridge between philosophy and cognitive

psychology. I will now start to apply this framework to the domain of social interaction, and, more specifically, to persuasive communication.

5. Intention and coordination in social interaction

5.1. Intentional cognitive effects of communication

In this section, I will outline some of the implications of Bratman's theory of planning and intentions for an intention-based theory of communication. Following Paul Grice's work (Grice, 1989), pragmatists have generally accepted that understanding an utterance involves recognizing the speaker's intentions. The role of intentions in communication is closely linked to their role in interpersonal coordination, as discussed by Bratman. In order to coordinate our actions efficiently with those of others, we need to be able to communicate successfully. For communication to be successful, the hearer must at least recognize the communicator's intention. Thus if intentions are to fulfill their coordinating role, some minimal degree of effective communication is required. Given that one of the roles of intentions is precisely to enable individuals to coordinate with others, it should hardly seem coincidental that communicating and making one's intentions known to others are intimately connected. One individual forms the intention to make another individual believe something in order to coordinate with him. When this intention is recognized and, if all goes well, the appropriate beliefs are formed by the audience, the interpersonal coordination role of intentions is facilitated.

In Chapter 1, I argued that relevance theory allows for the possibility that the communicative intention might be fulfilled (i.e., the informative intention recognized), without the informative intention itself being

fulfilled (i.e., the audience understands the communicator, but does not believe her). The informative intention is only fulfilled when the hearer adopts the offered information as part of his own beliefs (or more generally, part of his cognitive environment). Understanding the speaker's meaning and accepting the offered information are two different processes which can be distinguished straightforwardly within the two-level intention framework offered by relevance theory. In Bratman's framework, both of these intentions are subordinated to a higher-order intention to achieve some ulterior goal, and more generally, to coordinate one's actions with others: it is the agent's commitment to that higher level intention which necessitates the formation of the lower level communicative and informative intentions. Depending on what the agent/speaker is intending to achieve by coordinating with the audience, she may want no more than to have the audience understand her meaning and believe the information offered, or she may intend to achieve an ulterior goal by persuading the audience to form the intention to perform a certain action. Whatever the nature of the informative and communicative intentions conveyed, they are only a small part of a planning structure to which the communicator is typically committed.

5.2. Intention-shaping in communication

So far, I have only discussed the intentions which the speaker brings to the interaction. Clearly, however the hearer has his own set of intentions: for instance, to listen, to learn, to argue, to be informed, etc. These "audience intentions" also belong to complex planning structures, are embedded in higher-order intentions, and involve a commitment to performing certain actions. So communication creates an "interface" between the speaker's intention structure and the hearer's intention

structure, which enables intentions to perform their coordinating role. It is this coordinating role, and the commitment inherent to intentions, that make it possible for individuals not only to change others' attitudes, but to change their intentions and their behavior by rational argument or inducement, and without coercion.

I tried to show that by communicating, we provide our audience with evidence of attitudes and intentions beyond our communicative and informative intentions. This evidence may be noticed and processed by the audience, resulting in further cognitive effects: changes in the audience's own thoughts and attitudes that can lead to new intentions.

The intentions which the audience brings to the communicative interaction will also shape their inferential and practical reasoning processes, affecting comprehension and giving rise to further cognitive effects. Let us examine a series of illustrations:

- (9) If my intention is to ignore the background idle chat in a train compartment while I read, I will attempt to disable any cognitive processes leading to comprehension of the other passengers' utterances. While I can hear the chatter, I am not attending to it in any way.
- (10) If I am attempting to help a foreign student improve his English accent, my intention is to focus on the phonetic level of his utterances, and to correct it accordingly. Upon hearing a large number of mistakes, for instance, I may adjust my intentions, and choose not to immediately point out finer details, while addressing gross errors immediately.
- (11) If my intention is to identify and expose any evidence of

discriminatory attitudes in a communicator's speech, I will actively seek to read beyond her communicative and informative intentions and to focus on her higher-order intentions.

- (12) If, as I am shopping, a friendly salesperson compliments me on the fit of a garment I am trying on, I might try to determine whether her comments are sincere or meant to disguise her intention to reach her weekly sales quota, and I will adjust my own intention to purchase the outfit or not accordingly.

In (9), it seems that my "audience intentions" can prevent my processing the utterance beyond the most superficial level (i.e., ignoring the communicator's informative intention, since the utterance is not addressed to me). In (10), my audience intentions (to identify mispronunciations and correct the student) only require that I focus on the phonetic level of the speaker's utterances rather than on the speaker's communicative or informative intention. In (11), my intentions require that I explore the speaker's higher-order intentions, possibly including her intention to hide her true attitudes. I am using all possible aspects of the interaction to attribute (arguably, "over-attribute") meaning, beyond the speaker's communicative and informative intentions, and allowing such interpretation to shape my own further intentions (about whether to expose the speaker for political incorrectness). Finally, in (12) my intention to purchase suitable clothes requires that I consider the salesperson's intention beyond her communicative and informative intentions. I must determine whether her informative intention is subordinated to an intention to flatter me into buying the clothes, or an intention to ensure that her customers only buy

clothes that suit them well. My purchasing intention will be shaped as a direct consequence of this determination.

All these examples suggest that the interpersonal coordinating role of intentions, suggested by Bratman (1987), works both reciprocally and reflectively. Communication creates an interface that has the potential to affect both participants' attitudes as well as their intentions.

5.3. Intentional intention-shaping

I have so far examined the types of effects linked to a speaker's informative and communicative intentions, namely understanding and believing, but have not considered the further effects on the audience's attitudes and intentions intended by the speaker. If we accept the idea of an interface of intentions through communication, we must then distinguish between cases in which the potential intention-shaping is indeed intended by the speaker and those in which it is not. In each case, the hearer's own intentions will determine whether a more effortful attribution of higher-order intentions is justified. If I buy the outfit from the salesperson in example (9), is it (a) because I neglected or failed to recover her higher-order intention to flatter me, (b) in spite of my having recovered it, (c) because she had no such higher-order intention, or (d) my intention to buy the outfit was independent of the salesperson?

Communicators who intend to influence their audience's intentions and future actions use the communicative interface adeptly. By producing an utterance that is not only relevant enough to justify the audience's efforts to understand it, but also to break through what Bratman (1987) terms the audience's "inert" intention structure, either by providing a solution to a means-end coherence problem, or by triggering reconsideration of such a problem, a communicator can alter her audience's intentions and actions.

This type of persuasive tactic is familiar enough to competent interlocutors to have evolved into recognizable persuasion patterns. Achieving relevance via the use of such persuasive tactics is the persuasive communicator's challenge. From the audience or target's point of view, the admissibility filter, habits, norms and dispositions that constrain rational reconsideration and deliberation enable him to cope with such persuasive tactics on his own terms and to his own benefit. Controlling these constraining mechanisms and their level of sensitivity to persuasion attempts in order to efficiently balance the cost and benefit of being persuaded is the audience's challenge.

Let's look at an example:

(13) Car salesman: If you buy before the end of the month, you'll get this year's model at last year's price.

The salesman reads the potential customer's intention to buy a car in the next few months, and her general preference for saving money. The salesman's own intention is to reach his monthly sales quota by selling one more car before the end of the month, and to cause the customer to shift his purchasing intention forward in time. He presents a solution to the customer's means-end incoherence problem (the logistical details of buying a car) that is consistent with his beliefs and attitudes (wanting to save money), namely the proposition that the customer can save money by buying the car this month. He formulates his utterance accordingly.

Importantly, if the customer did not have a general preference for saving money (or had a stronger preference for delaying his purchase), the outcome of the persuasive attempt might simply be the customer adopting the belief that he could have saved money by buying sooner, without this attitude altering his behavior. In that case, the communicative act would

still be successful in that the salesperson's informative intention would be not only recognized, but fulfilled. However, the persuasive intention would remain unfulfilled: the persuasive act itself would be unsuccessful because of the failure by the salesman to properly read the customer's intentions. In other words, a successful act of persuasion depends on the communicator's ability to read the target's intentions, to find a proper strategy to affect the target's intentions, and then to communicate accordingly by sharing the intended attitude with the target. However, if the customer walks into the car dealership determined to disbelieve anything the salesperson says, he has set the sensitivity level of his reconsideration effort high enough that no amount of potential benefit would be sufficient to persuade him to buy before he is ready to do so on his own terms. The salesperson's persuasion attempt fails. Failure to persuade may thus result either from the communicator's inability to read the audience's intentions properly, or from the audience's rejecting the persuasion attempt after deliberation, or "disabling" reconsideration³.

The relevance-theoretic comprehension procedure is also developed within a framework of bounded rationality: an addressee follows a path of least effort in computing cognitive effects, considering interpretations in order of accessibility, and stops when her expectations of relevance are satisfied (Sperber and Wilson, 2002). The cognitive effects thus obtained by the addressee are the ones that enable him to comprehend the speaker's utterance and (in appropriate circumstances), to share the speaker's attitudes. So, in the car salesman example, the customer easily understands and has no reason to doubt that she can save money by buying the car sooner rather than later. The intended cognitive effects are achieved, and

³ Research into the effects of salespersons' compliments on customers attitudes and intentions (Campbell and Kirmani (2000)) will be discussed in Chapter 3, Section 5.3.

the speaker's informative intention is fulfilled. However, as suggested above, the salesman's persuasive intention is not fulfilled unless it successfully alters the customer's purchasing intention. In Bratman's framework, if it fails to do so, it is because it did not resolve the customer's means-end incoherence (it failed to provide the addressee with the type of cognitive effects that might have resolved her means-end incoherence). We might say that while the utterance satisfied the customer's expectations of relevance enough to allow her to understand and believe the salesman, it was not intention-relevant, in the sense that it did not affect the addressee's existing intentions (it did not offer a solution to her means-end incoherence problem that was consistent with her beliefs). Because there is no presumption of intention-relevance, there is no reason for the addressee to believe that expending further mental effort might yield further cognitive effects. However, the notion of intention-relevance is important to an understanding of persuasive communication. I will consider it more carefully in the next section.

5.4. Intention-relevance

Let's now examine what intention-relevance might consist in. I argued in Chapter 1, Section 4.2 that the relevance of an input to cognitive processes is a positive function of its benefits and a negative function of its costs, where costs are measured in terms of processing effort and benefits in terms of cognitive effects (e.g., roughly, knowledge gained, expectations rationally confirmed or disconfirmed). Intention-relevance, as I will use the term, is just one particular type of relevance, as it applies specifically to intentions. In the case of persuasive communication, the speaker's intentions contribute as both inputs and outputs to her practical reasoning processes, and as inputs to her communicative processes. A hearer's

intentions contribute as inputs and outputs to his practical reasoning processes.

When applied to the intentions and practical reasoning processes of both the communicator and the audience, processing costs can be construed of as resulting from the effort necessary to infer the applicability of a proposed solution to a means-end incoherence problem, and in reconsidering one's existing intention structure, and/or belief consistency. There are also costs and benefits measured in terms of cognitive effects on the agent and rationality effects on her planning structure. The benefits of a change in planning structure might be measured in terms of added coherence between the intentions adopted and the goals to be achieved, and added consistency with existing beliefs. These are not cognitive benefits *per se*, but benefits to one's practical reasoning processes. The costs incurred in engaging in these practical reasoning processes result directly from the inertia and consistency requirements on planning structures. It is because an agent's intentions are inherently stable, consistent with each other and coherent with background attitudes and beliefs that adopting new ones or changing existing ones (more generally, altering their structure) is costly. The applicability of a solution to a means-end incoherence problem must be weighed, as discussed earlier, against one's background framework of attitudes, beliefs and prior plans. Altering one's planning structure involves some deliberation and/or weighing of rationality considerations.⁴

In the case of persuasion, the communicator's persuasive intention will only be fulfilled if the target expects that the intention-related benefits to

⁴ While agents can make these deliberations vastly more efficient by using (bounded rationality) heuristic strategies that take advantage of regularities in the problems faced (e.g., Gigerenzer and Todd, 1999), their efficiency depends on their appropriate use (cf. Chapter 4). There is a cost associated with selecting these heuristic strategies: it is either the mental

him outweigh the expected cost of reconsidering his intentions to “suit the communicator.” We can try to imagine what a scale of intention-related processing costs might look like. Such costs can be seen as a positive function of factors affecting the reconsideration of intentions: for example, the difference in complexity between the two intentions, the level of commitment to the existing intention and consistency with beliefs. Low costs would result from a relatively small adjustment to either one’s plans or one’s beliefs. This property is exploited by communicators who persuade their targets via an incremental succession of small persuasive acts, as we shall see when we examine specific persuasive strategies in Chapters 3 and 4. At the other end of the scale, high costs would be incurred by a major “overhaul” of existing plans or beliefs. An important variable in the processing cost is how overt the persuasive intention is. The more overt the persuasive intention, the lower the cost of recognizing it.

The scale of cognitive benefits to one’s intentions would be a positive function of variables such as commitment, consistency and means-end coherence. The notion of intention-relevance brings the cost and benefit scales together. A persuasive attempt involving expected low cost to the target will be sufficiently relevant even if it offers relatively low expected benefits. For example, persuading a consumer to undertake an insignificant additional purchase (e.g. a pack of chewing gum at a supermarket checkout stand) need not require more than the suggestion of instant fresh breath. On the other hand, a costly reconsideration would only be worth undertaking if it delivered important benefits. A consumer who is highly committed to buying a given car model may only be persuaded to change his mind if the benefits of the alternative choice are great enough to warrant the effortful

effort necessary to ensure that they are used appropriately, or the price to pay for their failure when they are used inappropriately.

change in intention (e.g. for a safety-conscious driver, a price saving might not be a sufficient benefit while additional airbags might). Similarly, Williams et al. (2004) show that consumers who are asked to state their purchase intentions prior to making their purchases are more likely to carry out in these actions than customers who are not. Asking the subjects to state their intentions has the effect of prompting them to engage in practical reasoning. If the purchase they are asked to consider is indeed coherent and consistent with other intentions, desires and beliefs, they form an intention to undertake the purchase and communicate this intention in response to the investigator's question. Not only have they reaped the benefit of added coherence, they have done so on their own terms, without the cost of conceding to a persuader, and they have formed (and communicated) a commitment to undertake the action. The intention-relevance of this questioning technique makes it extremely effective, when used as a persuasive strategy, as it manages to "slip below defenses" unless it is recognized as persuasive, as discussed by Williams and her colleagues.

6. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have shown how an integrated approach to intention that pulls together previously disparate aspects of intentionality and places intentions at the center of a more general theory of action can shed new light on the role of intentions in social interaction, and particularly in communication. The meeting of two intentional structures (belonging to the two interlocutors) in communication creates an interface. Because it enables the beneficial coordination of actions, this interface is marked by a certain susceptibility of the audience's intentions to being shaped by the communicator's. This susceptibility can, under certain circumstances,

allow a speaker to shape the addressee's existing intentions, sometimes intentionally, as in the case of persuasion. A communicator who strikes the right balance by providing sufficient relevance to the audience's intentions in a cooperative way, and without causing them to suspect manipulation can indeed effectively persuade her audience. In Chapter 4, I will develop this account further by discussing specific strategies for communicators driven by a persuasive intention to offer intention-relevance. Before turning to that, I will review in the next chapter what types of cognitive effects social psychologists have associated with persuasion, and how they have described these effects as being achieved.

CHAPTER THREE

PERSUASION COMPETENCE

1. Introduction

My discussion so far has highlighted three key questions and proposed a theoretical framework which might be used to answer them. The three questions raised in Chapter 1 were:

- (a) How are different layers or levels of intentions linked to different layers of effects, e.g., those characteristic of persuasion?
- (b) What effects characterize successful persuasion? Do these effects go beyond the production of beliefs, and if so, how?
- (c) How is successful persuasion possible when the speaker cannot rely on the hearer's cooperation, and often has interests that are at odds with the hearer's?

In Chapter 1, I began to sketch out answers to questions (a) and (b), by introducing the idea that intentions play an important role at both ends of the persuasion process, the communicator's and the audience's. I argued in Chapter 2 that the structure and functions of intentions and the nature of the practical reasoning processes in which they figure both as inputs and as outputs account for the layering mentioned in (a), and for the effects that go beyond belief production, mentioned in (b). This account of intentions combines with a relevance-oriented account of cognition and communication to provide a clearer picture of how communication can be

used for persuasive ends and result in specific effects on a target's behavior. In other words, we also now have some preliminary answers to (c).

I will now move on to consider the specific effects of persuasion on an audience or target, starting with a brief review of previous work on the topic. Identifying the effects of persuasive communication on an audience and explaining how they are brought about has been a challenge for social psychologists for at least five decades. Arie Kruglanski and his colleagues sum it up as follows:

“Of the plethora of topics studied by social psychologists, persuasion must surely be among the “nearest and dearest” to the heart of our discipline. (...) Social psychology’s essential concern is with how people affect one another; persuasion reflects that concern in reference to people’s minds. It thus addresses a cognitive aspect of social influence – always of quintessential interest to social psychologists, and more so now than ever.” (Kruglanski et al., 1999, 293)

The challenge, as presented by Kruglanski and his colleagues, is to show how cognitive mechanisms have a bearing on social phenomena such as influence and attitude change.

In this chapter, I will review some of the most important theoretical proposals of social psychologists who have taken on this challenge, including some recent work that might combine well with relevance theory to yield a fuller account of persuasion. As might be expected given the popularity of the subject with social psychologists, there are many more theories and approaches than is possible to discuss here. I will consider only those more influential ideas that are compatible with the basic assumptions of relevance theory, and that have withstood scrutiny in

reviews such as Kelley and Michela, 1980; Eagly and Chaiken, 1993; Chaiken, Wood and Eagly, 1996; Petty and Wegener, 1998; Wood, 2000; Kruglanski et al., 2004.

2. Attribution Theory

Attribution theory was developed as a general way of explaining how individuals go about making sense of each other's behavior. Its main premise is that individuals tend to interpret events around them in causal terms. When applied to the domain of persuasion, it suggests that the target of a persuasion attempt tries to establish why the communicator is conveying a particular attitude, in order to decide whether or not to believe her.

At first sight, this approach shows some similarities to the accounts of intention detection discussed in Chapter 2. Indeed, researchers who have investigated the links between folk theories and the development of intentions (e.g. Malle, 2001, Rosati et al., 2001) see attribution theory as providing an important part of the background to current research on intention detection. The type of attribution process discussed in attribution theory also shows some similarity to the inferential processes involved in recognizing a communicator's intentions as discussed in Chapter 1. However, as I pointed out in Chapter 1, relevance theory sees comprehension as a dedicated, modular process distinct from the more general mind-reading processes used to attribute intentions to others (Wilson and Sperber, 2002, 276). The communicative process is embedded in a more general cognitive framework so that, apart from identifying a communicator's communicative and informative intentions, an audience may infer some of the communicator's higher-order intentions in order to derive further cognitive effects for use in his practical reasoning processes. This further type of intention-reading does not fall under the

communicative principle of relevance and is not attributed as part of the speaker's meaning, but can be undertaken by an audience with the general cognitive goal of maximizing relevance.

Attribution theory has its roots in early work on naïve psychology¹, self-perception² and non-common effects³, as discussed in Eagly and Chaiken, (1993), and has been applied to mechanisms other than persuasion.

However, much of the work on the theory over the last forty years has been carried out by Kelley and his colleagues (see e.g. Kelley, 1967; Kelley and Michela, 1980), and is specifically concerned with persuasion. The information conveyed can affect attributions of causality through two types of processes, one involving an effortful co-variation analysis of the stimulus and an evaluation of the different variables that could have caused the communicator to convey a given attitude, the other⁴ involving a more immediate attribution of cause on the basis of salience (according to which an effect is attributed to the most salient potential cause), or of primacy effects (according to which the process of attribution stops as soon as one possible cause has been identified).

Let's examine co-variation in greater detail, again following the work of Kelley and his colleagues (*ibid.*). Presented with a given stimulus, the audience examines three possible factors that could have caused the communicator to convey the given attitude (in order to attribute a reason, or combination of reasons, for the conveyed attitude). In other words, the audience can attribute the attitude conveyed in the stimulus to one (or a combination) of three causes: the communicator's beliefs and dispositions

¹ Heider, 1958, as discussed in Eagly & Chaiken (1993).

² Bem, 1967, as discussed in Eagly & Chaiken (1993).

³ Jones and Davis (1965) as discussed in Eagly & Chaiken (1993, 360-361). According to the "principle of non-common effects," behaviors are attributed to dispositions, and the less a behavior is expected, the stronger the inference that the agent's dispositions correspond to her behavior.

⁴ Introduced in later work on attribution theory, e.g. Kelley and Michela, 1980.

resulting in a “person” attribution; the characteristics of the interaction (e.g., the audience and the roles of each interlocutor), resulting in a “times” attribution; and whether the stimulus “provides a veridical description of the external reality it purports to describe” (Eagly and Chaiken, 1993, 352), resulting in an “entity” attribution. In order to do so, the audience conducts a “subjective analysis of variance” (represented in the form of a 3x3 matrix), and assesses whether the same attitude would have been conveyed under different scenarios. The audience can either imagine these scenarios and their hypothetical outcomes, or examine actual situations that fit these scenarios and base her conclusions on the outcomes of these actual situations. Three such scenarios are examined:

- (a) Would the same communicator have conveyed the same attitude about the same subject to a different audience?
- (b) Would a different communicator have conveyed the same attitude about the same situation to the same audience?
- (c) Would the same communicator have conveyed the same attitude about a different subject to the same audience?

Here is an example (adapted from Eagly and Chaiken, *Psychology of Attitudes* (1993, 393)) of how an audience (the subject) would attempt to attribute why a reviewer might have given a certain book a very positive review:

- (1) The subject reads a review of *Psychology of Attitudes* that rates it as a very good book. The subject evaluates (a) whether the reviewer has given it the same rating when addressing other audiences, (b) whether the reviewer agrees with other reviewers of the same book, and (c), whether he has been known to be critical of other comparable books. If it is the case that other

reviewers have been favorable, that this reviewer has made similar comments to different audiences and that he has been known to be critical of other books on attitudes, the review may be attributed to the quality of the book, and the subject may let herself be persuaded that the book is indeed very good (this is an “entity” attribution).

More generally, the three dimensions along which this analysis is performed are consensus (whether the attitude conveyed in the stimulus is in consensus with those expressed by other reviewers), consistency (whether the conveyed attitude is consistent with attitudes expressed to other audiences), and distinctiveness (whether the conveyed attitude is distinctive from that expressed about other books). Kelley (1967, 194) sums up the basis for this type of evaluation as follows: “The effect is attributed to that condition which is present when the effect is present and which is absent when the effect is absent.” High ratings in consensus, consistency and distinctiveness result in the audience attributing the cause of the communicator’s expressed attitude to the “entity,” rather than to the “person” (the communicator’s underlying dispositions), or to “times” (external circumstances such as the audience he was addressing, or whether he was performing some sort of role).

While the account just given of attribution theory (e.g. Kelley, 1967) treats the audience’s own attitudes as part of the external (“times”) factors, later accounts (e.g. Kelley and Michela, 1980) acknowledge a greater role for the audience’s beliefs and goals in attribution processes. In relevance-theoretic terms, these factors are part of the context in which the process of attribution takes place. Expectations about the communicator’s attitudes or behavior, for instance, or the audience’s own goals may be seen as contextual assumptions that combine with the information provided in the stimulus to suggest a particular attribution of causality. Seen in this light,

the attribution process begins to look increasingly like an inferential mind-reading process in which the audience infers the communicator's mental states on the basis of the stimulus provided.

In a 1981 study, Eagly, Chaiken and Wood (cf. Chaiken et al, 1989; Eagly and Chaiken, 1993) proposed a wider "multiple plausible causes framework," along similar lines. According to this study, causality is attributed by running through a wider and less structured range of possible contextual cues, such as the communicators' attitudes and intentions, and evaluating them for plausibility. The authors suggest that the audience's attitude is affected by "construct(ing) a mini-theory of the communicator's behavior on the basis of (...) causally relevant cues" (Eagly and Chaiken 1993, 355).

As noted above, attribution theory clearly shares a goal with relevance theory, and indeed with pragmatic accounts of communication for which intention attribution is key to communication, both from the communicator's perspective and from the audience's. As a model for persuasion research, however, attribution theory only represents a starting point. According to the cognitive principle of relevance "human cognition tends to be geared to the maximization of relevance" (Sperber and Wilson, 1995, 260). I have suggested that, in seeking greater relevance, a "sophisticated" audience (Wilson, 1999, 137) may attribute higher-order intentions to the communicator, possibly including a persuasive intention. The attribution of such higher-order intentions may involve some expenditure of effort, yielding greater positive cognitive effects. Attribution theory fails to account for these types of intention recognition by leaving some key issues unexplored.

The first issue left open is that attribution theory does not specify what constitutes a persuasive intention or explain how it achieves its effects. An audience that recognizes a communicator's persuasive intention must have some knowledge of the nature of such an intention and how it may affect

their own attitudes. Without investigating the process of persuasion itself, and considering how a persuasive intention can result in the intended effects, the theory is incomplete. Sometimes, an audience's recognition of the communicator's persuasive intention affects the persuasiveness of the stimulus. We cannot just assume that it always leads to skepticism or disbelief. If this were so, cases in which the persuasive intention is obvious, such as advertising or salesmanship, would simply be ineffective. This is clearly not true, and we know that successful persuasion involves a wide range of factors that may override the audience's recognition that the communicator is less than sincere. But attribution theory does not address any of these issues. As noted in Chapter 1 (Section 2.4), an audience can indeed be persuaded without believing what the communicator says.

I have been arguing that persuasion involves both a specific type of speaker intention and specific cognitive effects on the audience's intention structure. I will try to show in my discussion of coping mechanisms in section 5 below, and throughout the next several chapters, that, having recognized the speaker's persuasive intention, an audience does indeed tend to exercise greater caution in assessing the persuasive stimulus. However, this does not always rule out any possibility of successful persuasion, because the speaker's persuasive intention can be fulfilled even when the audience identifies the persuasive intention and discounts the speaker's credibility accordingly.

Finally, in spite of the discussion of less effortful attributive processes in later work (salience and primacy effects, see pg. 119 above), attribution theory does not seriously address the issues of effort or efficiency: specifically, it does not consider how much cognitive effort goes into processes such as the analysis of variance described above. If it is true that attribution of higher-order intentions is relevance-driven, we must consider how the balance between expenditure of mental effort and the derivation of positive cognitive effects affects the course of the attribution process,

whether it is conducted effortlessly or with the use of greater mental resources. There is ample evidence that mind-reading is a largely automatic mechanism, a modularized ability that has evolved in order to enable individuals to read each other's intentions more efficiently. In the case of communication, we've also seen that Sperber and Wilson (e.g., 2002) have argued for the existence of a separate comprehension module, at least partly on efficiency grounds:

“We doubt that normal verbal comprehension is achieved either by wondering what beliefs and desires would make it rational for the speaker to have produced a given utterance, or by simulating the state of mind that might have led her to produce it.” (Sperber and Wilson, 2002, 12).

Intention attribution is clearly a key component of communication, persuasion and other social interactions, but it is unlikely to be handled in the effortful and apparently discursive manner suggested by attribution theorists.

More generally, I believe that attribution theory fails to capture the important role of intentions in persuasion. In fact, it does not refer to intentions, but, rather, to causes of attitudes and/or events. If actions are caused by the intentions they are designed to fulfill (possibly, via their characteristic commitment, as proposed by Bratman and discussed in Chapter 2, Section 2), then attributing the causes of a stimulus does indeed amount to recognizing the speaker's intentions. However, this point is not made in attribution theory. And, at the other end of the process, the object of higher-order intentions is not simply a change of attitudes in the audience, but rather a change in intentions. Again, this point is overlooked in attribution theory.

Because attitudes themselves are not directly observable, it is only when they contribute to practical reasoning processes and result in actions that they can be reliably detected. By failing to take adequate account of a communicator's intentions (and not considering any aspect of the target's own intentions), attribution theory falls short of providing an adequate framework for the study of persuasion. In my view, this is a common weakness in most accounts of persuasion found in social psychology.

Despite these theoretical weaknesses, attribution theory has nonetheless had a strong and valuable impact on persuasion research by providing the basis for subsequent theories as I will show in the next section.

3. How many roads to persuasion?

3.1. The dual-route processes

In my discussion of attribution theory, I indicated that later versions of the theories consider the possibility that audiences can engage in two types of processes in assessing a speaker's attitudes and credibility. A process such as co-variation analysis for instance, whereby individuals isolate one variable at a time and observe its interaction with other variables, mobilizes a large amount of cognitive resources. On the other hand, an assessment of causality based on the rule of thumb that "the most salient variable is usually the most critical" would qualify as a simple way to assess the speaker's intentions and may result in accurate assessments in many cases. In view of the relevance-theoretic claim that "human cognition tends to be geared to the maximization of relevance," (Wilson and Sperber, 2002, 254) involving the balancing of effort and cognitive effects, it is plausible that there may be a range of persuasion mechanisms running from conscious, reflective ones that weigh the effects of each variable, to rule-of-thumb heuristic processes that select one attribute (such as salience or primacy) as a "good enough" indicator of causality. Two such accounts of persuasion

were developed in parallel and almost simultaneously: one by Petty and Cacioppo (1986), the Elaboration Likelihood Model; the other by Chaiken, Liberman and Eagly (1989), the Heuristic Systematic Model. Both models have been important in the development of current accounts of persuasion in social psychology, and have been frequently updated over the last fifteen years to reflect further research in the field. The two models share many features, but differ on some significant points, as we will see.

Petty and Cacioppo (1986), in developing their elaboration likelihood model, argued that there are two different paths to persuasion (which they defined as attitude change). The late 1970's had seen the publication of large amounts of mostly empirical research on persuasion, resulting in often conflicting conclusions. Despite some evidence to the contrary, most researchers until the early 1980's saw attitude change as resulting from the "elaboration" of persuasive arguments.

"Elaboration" of persuasive arguments, a term used extensively in social psychology, involves the deployment of substantial cognitive resources in evaluating the information conveyed via a persuasive stimulus. Chaiken and her colleagues (1989, 212) define elaboration as a "comprehensive, analytic orientation in which perceivers assess all informational input for its relevance and importance to their judgment task, and integrate all useful information in forming their judgments."

In relevance-theoretic terms, we might view elaboration as an inferential process in which the hearer carefully evaluates the relative strengths of all assumptions involved. This includes new assumptions conveyed by the stimulus and "old" assumptions retrieved from encyclopedic memory as part of the context in which the stimulus is processed. The strength of an assumption is characterized in relevance theory as the degree of certainty with which we entertain the assumption (Sperber and Wilson, 1986, 1995, 75-78). As noted above, information derived from perception is generally regarded as strongly evidenced, and is held as a strong assumption. If we

merely hear someone's description of an event, the strength of the resulting assumption may depend on how much we trust the person who reports the event. If an assumption is derived from other assumptions via inference, its strength will depend on the strength of the premises used to derive it. As new information confirms or contradicts our existing assumptions, they will be strengthened, weakened or, possibly, abandoned. The greater the change, the greater the cognitive effects and hence the greater the relevance. When engaging in what social psychologists call "elaborative processing," one would carefully evaluate the source of each assumption and assess its strength in terms of the available evidence before accepting it as a premise to be used in further inferential processes. Since social psychologists account for persuasive effects solely in terms of attitude change (rather than the adoption of an intention which I am defending in this thesis), elaboration is seen as resulting in a change of attitude to a particular assumption, reflecting the strength with which the assumption is held.

While the two teams of researchers (Petty and Cacioppo, and Chaiken et al.) found plentiful evidence for "elaborative" processes leading to persuasion, they also saw evidence of attitude change resulting from much faster, more automatic processes of a non-elaborative nature. Both teams interpreted this as evidence of two routes to persuasion. While the so-called "central processing route" (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986), or "systematic" processing (Chaiken et al., 1989) makes extensive use of cognitive resources to understand and elaborate the argument conveyed by the stimulus, the "peripheral route" (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986) or "heuristic" mode (Chaiken et al., 1989, Eagly and Chaiken, 1993) uses fewer cognitive resources and allows a range of automatic mechanisms to affect the hearer's attitudes. Rather than being mutually exclusive, the two processes are seen by both teams as representing extreme points on a continuum and tend to jointly contribute to most instances of attitude

change. In such cases, different variables can be processed more or less centrally, or peripherally.

Apart from demonstrating the existence of two different routes to persuasion, both models analyzed the variables that lead the audience to adopt one or the other “persuasion route,” and illustrate the types of persuasive effects that can be expected from each. Attitude change variables discussed by Petty and Cacioppo (1986, 1998) fall into four categories: the source (communicator), the message (stimulus), the recipient (audience) and the context.

Communicator-related variables include trustworthiness and familiarity to the audience, likeability, physical attractiveness, expertise (real or perceived), status, etc. One might expect that stimuli originating from trustworthy, likeable, familiar, or expert sources will tend to be processed more peripherally, as they may be perceived as more credible and less manipulative. I shall explore some of these effects further in my discussion of social influence in section 4 below.

Stimulus-related variables include the content of the arguments presented and some aspects of the form of the stimulus, including its length, style, medium, complexity, etc. It is important to note that because the model doesn’t make any claims about how the stimulus itself is understood, there is no discussion of communicative and informative intentions or the notion of speaker’s meaning. As a result, there is no way to link the cognitive effects on the audience back to the intentions of the communicator, as is possible with a relevance-theoretic account.

Audience variables include motivation, availability of cognitive resources and prior knowledge. Both dual-route models claim that elaboration likelihood, or the probability that a persuasive stimulus will be centrally processed, is higher when the hearer is highly motivated to process the stimulus, for instance when he is shopping for a particular product and wants to understand the differences between brands.

Another, more critical aspect of motivation that is claimed to affect processing in both models is the “accuracy,” (e.g., Eagly and Chaiken, 1993, 339) or “correctness” motive (Petty and Wegener, 1999, 44), according to which “at least at a conscious level, people want to hold opinions (and come to judgments) that are correct.” Social psychologists often appeal to this type of motivating force to refer to a general need for humans to hold true beliefs and to “do the right thing.” In relevance theory, the same kind of motivation is captured by the cognitive principle of relevance, which states that “human cognition tends to be geared to the maximization of relevance” (Sperber and Wilson, 1995, 260). Maximizing relevance involves the derivation of positive cognitive effects (see Chapter 1, Section 4.2). Positive cognitive effects are mainly described as improvements to knowledge (Sperber and Wilson, 1995, 266), but, according to Sperber and Wilson, the notion can also be broadened to include the “elaboration of rational desires.” Beliefs that are not true and desires that do not contribute to one’s overall goals are, in general, not worth having. So the tendency to maximize relevance is a tendency to want to hold true beliefs and worthwhile rational desires. The “accuracy” or “correctness” goal stipulated by social psychologists is therefore reflected in the cognitive principle of relevance. In elaboration-likelihood terms, my accuracy motives will lead me to take more information for granted when reading a newspaper I trust (i.e., perform less elaboration) than reading a newspaper I distrust, or one I do not know.

The availability of cognitive resources is discussed both in terms of the mental effort required to perform a given task, and in terms of the time and resource pressures under which the individual operates in performing it. Factors such as distracting noise, the complex layout of an ad, time pressure, conflicting priorities, and so on, may make it too taxing to process a stimulus elaboratively and, under relatively low accuracy motivation conditions, may result in the audience taking a heuristic shortcut. Such

mechanisms, or rules of thumb, typically associate a given “cue” in the stimulus, or a given feature of the speaker, with a conclusion that has proven valid in the past. When motivation and resources are both present, the hearer will most likely engage in elaborating the arguments, and the resulting attitude change (either for, or against the communicator’s arguments) will tend to be strong, long-lasting, resistant to counter-argumentation and predictive of future behavior.

Let’s look at an example of each of the two extreme types of processing:

- (2) An amateur of high performance cars (high motivation) reading an automotive magazine in a quiet environment (high expertise, high processing ability) focuses on particular performance statistics and reads all the available reviews of the cars he is considering. After comparing them in detail and reading a particularly compelling review, he decides to purchase a certain car (argument elaboration). This is an example of high motivation and high processing ability allowing effective persuasion (by the reviewer whose model he chose) via the central persuasion route.
- (3) An occasional driver who is not in the market for a new car and thinks of cars purely as means of transportation (low motivation) will glance at an ad in a Sunday magazine while standing in a crowded railway station newspaper stand (low expertise, low processing ability). The ad features a large family piling into a minivan (cue to a conclusion that has been valid in the past). When asked later about his knowledge of the vehicle, he may describe it as particularly appropriate for large families. This is an example of low motivation and low processing ability leading

to peripheral processing (minivans are the best options for large families).

These examples represent extreme instances of the two persuasion routes: most cases of persuasion typically fall somewhere between the two extremes. A persuasive stimulus may be processed partially via the central route, while some of the cues it provides can still produce peripheral effects. For instance, in (2) above, although the reader of the magazine has the resources and motivation to think about the details of his purchase, he may still use the rule of thumb that an expert such as a retired racecar driver will provide valuable advice about a car's characteristics. Rather than analyzing all of the mechanical specifications, he may take the expert's opinion for granted on some of these specifications.

Crucially, as mentioned above, neither of the two dual-route models, nor any of the other social psychology accounts of persuasion, discusses the production end of persuasive stimuli: as a result, these models fail to relate persuasion to the communicator's intentions. This is a critical failure, in my view, as it leaves open the question of whether the communicator has a persuasive intention and, if so, whether the communicator intentionally targets the elaborative or peripheral processes, or both. This is an important question in fields where persuasive strategies are widely used (e.g., law or marketing) as attributing a persuasive intention may have important implications for accountability or liability in some of these fields. By contrast, in a communication and intention-based account of persuasion, we are interested in finding out whether the communicator does indeed have a persuasive intention, how she uses communication to fulfill it and what its effects are on the target audience.

While based on many of the same assumptions as the elaboration likelihood model, the heuristic systematic model (Chaiken, Liberman and Eagly, 1989), especially in more recent versions (e.g. Chen and Chaiken,

1999) attempts to go beyond the study of persuasion to develop a more general cognitive framework, and to deal with a wider range of goals than the goal of “accuracy” discussed above. According to the “multiple motivation hypothesis,” developed by Chaiken and her colleagues (Chen and Chaiken, 1999), there are two other types of motivation apart from accuracy that may affect a target audience’s processing of persuasive stimuli: the defense motivation, according to which individuals aim to hold attitudes that are consistent with their own interests and beliefs, and the impression motivation, which tends to favor attitudes that satisfy social goals. As we’ll see in our discussion of social influence in section 4 below, these same general types of motives have been shown by other researchers to provide particularly strong pressure towards compliance, as witness their extensive use by individuals whose jobs depend on their persuasive skills. Importantly, however, Chaiken, Eagly and their colleagues see the effects of this broader range of motives as affecting only the information-processing task and as having no effect on the wider process of practical reasoning and intention adoption that results from the information-processing task, as I am proposing here (“the distinct impact that different motivations are likely to exert on information processing.” (Chen and Chaiken, 1999, 76)).

Another feature which is common to the two dual-route models, but is discussed in greater detail by Chaiken, Eagly and their colleagues (e.g., Chen and Chaiken, 1999) is the “sufficiency” principle. According to this principle, individuals are “economy-minded” and will only expend the cognitive effort necessary to reach a desired level of confidence on the issue at hand in a given persuasive context. Once that confidence has been reached, no further cognitive effort need be expended. This notion has an obvious relation to relevance theory, as relevance itself is characterized in terms of cognitive effects gained vs. efforts expended. More generally, the sufficiency principle places the heuristic-systematic model as a type of

bounded rationality (Simon, 1955; 1978; 1993; Gigerenzer and Selten, 2001) which I shall discuss at greater length in Chapter 4. The key point I want to mention for now is that efficient processing of information (i.e., processing that balances efforts vs. effects) is often the most rational choice, and that the use of heuristic processes can often be as rational as elaboration.

In the heuristic-systematic framework, high motivation is linked to high personal relevance of the issue at hand, which in turn requires a high confidence threshold which can only be met via relatively effortful processing. In situations demanding high confidence, heuristic processing is not sufficient to reach the confidence threshold. Interestingly, in cases which require a high confidence level, but where systematic processing is not possible because of physical limitations (e.g. low message comprehensibility), the persuasive effect of heuristics is heightened so that the individual can reach her desired confidence level. The heuristic systematic model raises important issues for the study of cognition and communication. The fact that relevance theory has implications not only for communication, but also for cognition in general makes it particularly well-suited for further exploration of these issues.

3.2. The unimodel, one single process

A measure of the impact of dual-route theories on social psychology in general, and attitude and persuasion research in particular, is the amount of on-going research they have given rise to. Recent work by Kruglanski and his colleagues (Kruglanski et al., 1999, Kruglanski et al., 2004) proposes to simplify the dual-route models into a single process that encompasses all forms of persuasion. This solution seems to follow logically from one of the tenets of both dual-route models, that elaboration and heuristic processing are two ends of a spectrum.

According to Kruglanski and his colleagues, persuasion is “a process of hypothesis testing and inference in the course of which persons acquire beliefs on the basis of relevant information” (Kruglanski et al, 1999, 295). The types of inferential processes involved are described in terms that exhibit some resemblance to the types of inference processes proposed by Sperber and Wilson (1986, 1995) and discussed in Chapter 1 (section 4.2.). Elements that contribute to these inferential processes may be derived from the stimulus itself, or from an individual’s memory, which provides contextual assumptions that combine with the stimulus to yield a set of conclusions. A central feature of the unimodel argument is the fact that both elaborative processes and heuristic processes use conditional premises of the form “if...then.” In the view of Kruglanski and his colleagues, while there are clear quantitative differences in the amount of cognitive effort used for heuristic vs. elaborative inferencing, there are no qualitative differences. The fact that heuristic processing operates more often on peripheral cues than on the content of the argument itself, whereas elaborative processing tends to focus mostly on the content of the argument, does not make a significant difference to the nature of the inferences involved, as the evidence itself (argument or peripheral) contributes in similar ways.

Here is an illustration (from Kruglanski et al, 1999, 296-297). An internationally renowned environmental expert declares that “the use of freon in household appliances is detrimental to the ozone layer and should be prohibited.” An environmentally-minded individual who believes that the ozone layer should be protected at all cost would conclude roughly that “the ozone layer must be protected. If freon endangers the ozone layer, all sources of freon should be banned.” A less environmentally-committed, or otherwise occupied, individual might conclude, “this expert seems to know what he’s talking about; matters like these are best left to experts. If an expert like him thinks freon appliances should be banned, they probably

should be.” Both inferential processes are of the “if-then” type and the only difference is the type of premise used in the inferences. In the first case, it is drawn from the argument itself: “if freon is detrimental to the ozone layer (new information) and the ozone layer must be protected (previously held belief that contributes to the context), then...”. In the second case, the premise is “if this man is an expert (new information), and experts know better (previously held belief that triggers heuristic), then...”.

One problem with this analysis, according to Chen and Chaiken (1999) is that not all heuristics are of the conditional form “if-then,” and, more generally, not all heuristics involve inference. In other words, Chaiken and her colleagues see real qualitative differences between elaborative processing and heuristics. A review of the recent extensive literature on heuristics (e.g., Gigerenzer et al., 1999; Gigerenzer and Selten, 2001) suggests that there is indeed a wider range of heuristic processes than those described by Kruglanski and his colleagues, and that these processes may involve quite different machinery from elaborative inferential processes of the type discussed above. In fact, it may be because they do differ qualitatively from elaborative inferential processes that heuristics are as powerful as they are currently thought to be. This point will be discussed further in Chapter 4, Section 3.

4. Social influence

While dual-process models focus on the inferential “information processing” triggered by a persuasive stimulus, social influence models focus on the cultural dynamics that can lead to attitude change, and on how these forces can be co-opted to persuasive ends. This perspective captures another important aspect of the view of persuasion I am defending, where both the communicator’s and the audience’s motives, and more specifically their intention structures, contribute to the intended effects on the

audience's behavior. In this perspective, motives have to do more than merely determine how elaborative one's inferential information processing should be. Here, the model developed by Robert Cialdini (1993, 2001) is particularly interesting and productive and I will consider it in some detail.

Cialdini (1993, 2001) is skeptical about the suitability of controlled experimental situations for eliciting the full range of compliance⁵ tactics that occur naturally in social interactions. He therefore sets out to gain first-hand understanding of the practices used by "compliance professionals" (e.g., salespeople). Using the research methodology of cultural anthropologists, he immersed himself for three years in the professional lives of "those individuals whose business or financial well-being depends on their ability to induce compliance (e.g. sales people, fund-raisers, advertisers, political lobbyists, cult recruiters, negotiators, con artists)" (Cialdini and Trost, 1998, 169). He assumed that, since less-effective tactics would tend to be discarded over time (or those practicing them would lose their jobs), his study would yield some insight into the most effective strategies for achieving compliance. For the same reason, he also focused on situations in which compliance tactics were taught, or passed on from one generation to another. The collected data were found to fall into six categories depending on the compliance-motivating forces: authority, social validation, scarcity, liking, reciprocation and consistency. Continuing research by Cialdini and others have since provided further validation of these categories and the tactics they incorporate (see Cialdini and Trost, 1998; Cialdini, 2001; and Cialdini and Goldstein, 2004). I will

⁵ Compliance is defined in a recent article by Cialdini and Goldstein (2004, 592) as "a particular kind of response – acquiescence – to particular kind of communication – a request." However, it is not clear how well this definition reflects Cialdini's actual use of the word "compliance": the word "acquiescence" does not necessarily denote a change in intention or behavior, whereas it is clear from all of Cialdini's work that he sees the response to compliance requests as the performance of a specific behavior. He sometimes uses the more specific expression "behavioral compliance" (e.g., Cialdini and Trost, 1998, 169), but seems to use the two terms interchangeably.

now examine the six categories, but will return to what I see as their critical role in social intelligence, and hence in persuasion, in Chapter 4.

Clearly, presenting oneself as a figure of authority, or claiming that a certain action is in line with the expectations of such an authority figure can result in compliance. What matters here is the perception of authority, which can be illusory rather than real. Security guards in department stores are dressed in uniforms resembling those of police officers, although they have no connection to the police and often have no authority other than as employees of the store. This raises questions about what constitutes authority, under what circumstances it is effective in gaining compliance and which types of audiences an authority-based tactic should target. Authority is linked not only to the perception of power, but also to expertise or the illusion of expertise. Thus, knowing what type of authority to appeal to in an argument aimed at a given audience requires some understanding of the audience's own attitudes. The effectiveness of appeals to authority based on power and expertise (or the illusion of power and expertise) has been shown in numerous experiments cited and described by Cialdini and his colleagues (*ibid.*).

The tactic of social validation relies on the tendency of individuals to assess their actions against those of other group members, particularly in situations of uncertainty. Thus, individuals who are uncertain about which course of action to take will tend to follow their peers. Cialdini cites several empirical studies and some anecdotal evidence that confirm the effectiveness of social validation as a tactic. Some evangelical preachers, for instance, have their own staff come forward at the beginning of their services, and provide testimonials of their healing powers in order to incite members of the public to follow suit (Cialdini and Trost, 1998, 172).

The appeal of scarcity as a motivating force is also well documented. Individuals tend to take advantage of an opportunity when it is seen as scarce, or about to disappear, sometimes regardless of the desirability of

what is on offer. Thus, customers tend to buy items on sale that they might not need or want otherwise. This tactic is used extensively in sales and marketing. An illusion of scarcity can be created by using tags such as: “hurry while supplies last,” or “inventory must be reduced” on ads or in stores.

The use of authority, social validation and scarcity as compliance tactics all appeal to what Cialdini terms a target’s goal of “effective action,” (Cialdini and Trost, 1998) or “accuracy” (Cialdini and Goldstein, 2004). These are the same terms used by Chaiken et al. (1998) and discussed in Section 3.1 above, and this type of motivation is characterized in similar ways by both teams of researchers. In general, individuals try to make the right decisions by taking what they perceive as the most “effective” course of action. Under conditions of uncertainty, time pressure or lack of cognitive resources, when an informed decision is not possible, the outcome can often be improved by using such simple rules of thumb as “follow someone who knows,” “go with the majority,” “take it now before it runs out,” or “if there isn’t much left, it’s probably because it’s good.”

Apart from wanting to make the right decisions, individuals also want to build good relationships and maintain existing ones. In this category of compliance tactics, we find the same general type of motivation described by Chaiken et al. (1998) as leading to the satisfaction of social goals (the “impression” motivation). Actions that help promote important relationships tend to be seen as more desirable, and this tendency can be co-opted by others in order to induce compliance or achieve persuasion. Information coming from, or associated with, a well-liked individual, or promoting a stronger feeling of “liking” between the two interlocutors, will be more readily accepted. Similarly, whenever a target is induced to enter a reciprocal relationship in which goods, information or goodwill are exchanged, there is an increased likelihood for compliance or persuasion to be achieved. Thus, a salesman will offer a potential customer’s child a

treat in order to seem likeable, a negotiator will exhibit goodwill by giving in on a seemingly crucial point in order to persuade the other side to reciprocate with another show of goodwill, thereby fulfilling the original persuasive intention.

Finally, the appeal to consistency is also a powerful motivator and falls under what Cialdini analyzes as a “goal of managing one’s self-concept.” In other words, information that is, or appears to be, consistent with previously held beliefs or actions is judged to be more reliable. The “foot in the door” technique is one such tactic used in sales and marketing. A salesperson relies on the fact that a decision to buy is more easily taken if it is taken in small incremental steps, each one to follow on from the previous one. For instance, in selling a car, the incremental steps proposed might include sitting in the driver’s seat, taking a test drive, suggesting a standard, no-frills model, recommending a slight upgrade etc. To the customer, each step seems to be consistent with the previous one and easier to take than if the full decision to purchase an expensive car had been taken all at once. Again, while described in slightly different terms, this type of motivation is strongly reminiscent of the third motivation category discussed by Chaiken et al. (1999), namely the motivation to “hold attitudes and beliefs that are congruent with one’s perceived material interests or existing self-definitional attitudes and beliefs” (Chaiken et al., 1999, 77). These types of motivating forces also resemble the coherence and consistency requirements on practical reasoning suggested by Bratman (1987), and discussed in Chapter 2, Section 2.

While Cialdini’s six motivators were studied in business contexts, they appear, at least intuitively, to be applicable to broader social domains. In Chapter 5, I will argue that they are also linked to cultural transmission and adaptive behaviors in a way that can explain their role in persuasion. For now, I want to emphasize that the six motivating forces seem capable of affecting both elaborative and heuristic processes. Take the feature of

authority. The fact that a persuasive stimulus was produced by an authoritative communicator may encourage an audience to process it elaboratively, because they expect it to be particularly enriching or thought-provoking. On the other hand, the same stimulus produced by the same person, may prompt an audience to accept the offered conclusions without much question, based on a rule of thumb that authoritative communicators know more about their subjects. I will discuss the importance of these motivators in persuasive processes in much greater detail at the end of this chapter, and further in Chapters 4 and 5.

In my view, the tactics discussed by Cialdini play an important role in persuasion. Whereas the persuasion variables discussed by attribution and dual-route theorists affect the attitudes of targets, and their beliefs in particular, the tactics discussed here directly affect intention formation and behavior. As noted above, I see the intended effect of persuasion as the target's adoption of a new intention (or modification of an existing one). Thus, persuasion tactics aimed directly at modifying an individual's intentions rather than their attitudes should play an important role in my account.

5. Marketplace metacognition

In a recent article on the state of consumer behavior research, Peter Wright (2002) coins the term “marketplace metacognition” to describe the ability of individuals to think about their own and others' attitudes, knowledge and cognitive processes in the “marketplace.” Wright suggests that the “marketplace,” by which he means the exchange of information, goods and services, can be understood as involving a sub-domain of our social intelligence. The notion of social intelligence occupies a central role in the persuasion framework I am developing in this thesis. Intuitively, social intelligence is the form of intelligence that enables individuals to

engage in social interaction. Work by Byrne, Whiten and their colleagues (e.g., Byrne and Whiten, 1988; Whiten and Byrne, 1997) suggests that the pressures of social interaction have favored the evolution of skills specifically geared to improving the effectiveness of social interaction, so that a form of social intelligence, quite different from that needed for interaction with the physical environment has evolved in many species and, particularly, in humans. Because many of the abilities that make up social intelligence involve manipulating others in order to fulfill one's own needs, social intelligence is sometimes referred to as "Machiavellian intelligence" (e.g., Byrne and Whiten, 1988; Whiten and Byrne, 1997). Persuasion, the use of communication to further one's own interests is intimately connected with social intelligence and marketplace metacognition, as discussed by Wright.

In fact, Wright speculates not only that our ability to interact effectively with others by capturing their attention, getting them to believe or understand their intentions is an aspect of social intelligence, but that marketplace metacognition might even constitute a distinct sub-module of social intelligence evolved from the highly developed competence of both consumers and marketers. The purpose of Wright's hypothesis is clearly to throw a challenge to the consumer research community; he recognizes its highly speculative nature and does not argue it in the context of this article.

Whether Wright's proposal is interpreted strictly as involving a marketing module, or more generally as involving a dedicated skill for communicative persuasion, it is one of the first attempts to introduce developmental cognitive psychology, evolutionary psychology, cultural anthropology and cultural evolution into a research domain where they have not had much impact so far. Most consumer behavior researchers, although educated as social psychologists, are employed by business school marketing departments to give marketing professionals a better understanding of their targets and how to achieve their goals. Wright challenges his colleagues to

develop a deeper understanding of the marketplace as involving a sub-domain of social intelligence, and to examine the mechanisms that might distinguish it from other domains involving more general social intelligence abilities. This is one of the goals I hope to contribute to in the next three chapters.

In the last three sections, on attribution theory, dual-route processes and social influence, I have shown that research on persuasion has increasingly focused on the idea that the cognitive and motivational processes of both interlocutors interact and complement each other. We started by considering an account of how audiences respond to a given persuasive stimulus, moved on to one that examines how audiences process a persuasive stimulus and how it affects their attitudes, and, finally considered a more proactive account of how the audience may make a substantial contribution to the fulfillment of the communicator's persuasive intention, depending on their own goals, and on the ability of communicators to exploit them. The range and sophistication of these cognitive processes suggests the existence of higher-order forms of "metacognition" that enable individuals not only to represent each other's intentions, but to modify their own intentions in anticipation of what the other may intend. At the end of Chapter 2, I began sketching a framework based on this idea. However a metacognitive approach of this type is fairly recent in social psychology: the first metacognitive account of persuasion was given by Wright and his colleague Marian Friestad in their 1994 article on the "persuasion knowledge model." This account surveys many previous approaches to persuasion and shows how they may all be seen as evidencing a higher-order metacognitive ability that humans have evolved in order to persuade each other, whether in the marketplace or in non-marketplace environments. Friestad and Wright's original article has inspired a great deal of further work, mostly in the domain of consumer behavior, but with implications for the study of persuasion in general. I

will begin by summarizing the original account and then look at some more recent developments.

5.1. The persuasion knowledge model

Friestad and Wright (1994) introduced the term “persuasion knowledge model” to refer to a so-called folk-theory of persuasion, but it has since come to be used to also refer to Friestad and Wright’s own theory.

Attribution theory has made a substantial contribution to the development of the persuasion knowledge model. According to Friestad and Wright, individuals faced with attempts at persuasion seek to “adaptively respond to these (...) attempts so as to achieve their own goals” (Friestad and Wright, 1994, 1). The target’s response is seen as “adaptive” because his attribution of a persuasive intention to the communicator is part of his ability to “cope” with the persuasion attempt in such a way as to fulfill his own goals and intentions. For Friestad and Wright, to “cope” is to respond adaptively to a persuasive stimulus. The term is meant to be neutral as to whether the target responds by accepting or rejecting the attitude change proposed. For instance, a television viewer may choose to ignore a particular commercial, treat it as entertainment, allow himself to be persuaded by it, use it to inform himself about the advertised product while retaining some skepticism, or use it to learn more about television advertising. These are all “coping” strategies used in response to a persuasion stimulus and reflecting the audience’s own adaptive goals and intentions.

One of these adaptive goals is to “hold valid, accurate attitudes ” (cf. discussion in Section 3.1 above) about both the stimulus and the communicator in order to fulfill the “overriding goal (...) to maintain control over the outcome and thereby achieve whatever mix of goals is salient to (them)” (Friestad and Wright 1994, 3). Underlying the effort to acquire valid attitudes, is the individual’s persuasion knowledge model, a

folk-model of persuasion that individuals develop as they use and respond to effective persuasion. According to Friestad and Wright, the attempt to acquire valid attitudes about the stimulus and the source may involve the use of both systematic and heuristic processes.

A major contribution of the persuasion knowledge model is its claim that the skills used by targets of persuasive attempts to respond adaptively are no different from those used by communicators wanting to persuade. Clearly, each player needs to be able to metarepresent the other's intentions in order to respond adaptively. The persuasion knowledge model is the same for both interlocutors as they exchange roles. At the production end, a persuasion agent combines her persuasion knowledge with her topic and target knowledge to produce a persuasive attempt. At the target end, the audience's persuasion knowledge combines with other contextual information to enable the audience to understand the communicator's meaning and, possibly, derive further positive cognitive effects.

The persuasion knowledge model was mainly developed in the context of consumer research to show how consumers cope with all forms of marketing stimuli. However, as noted by Friestad and Wright, it is equally applicable to other types of persuasion. Although not specifically characterized as such by Friestad and Wright, persuasion knowledge, a "somewhat loose set of interrelated beliefs" (Friestad and Wright, 1994, 6) is in effect a higher-order structure that records recurrent patterns and tactics across a range of topics and agents, which is constantly refined and revised by social agents and used both to persuade and to cope with persuasive attempts. An understanding of the six motivating forces highlighted by Cialdini (1993, 2001) would constitute an example of persuasion knowledge (although this is not explicitly mentioned by Friestad and Wright (1994)). Of course, folk-models have an important cultural dimension, and Friestad and Wright discuss this point in a later paper (Friestad and Wright, 1995) in which they locate their model within a

cultural framework. While their earlier paper was concerned with the development of persuasion knowledge in individuals as they are exposed to a wide range of instances of persuasion, the later paper discusses the diffusion of persuasion knowledge within a culture, and the role of “experts” in facilitating both the diffusion process and the evolution of the model along the way. The social transmission of persuasion knowledge and its cultural implications are important elements of the overall account of persuasion proposed in this thesis, and I will come back to these aspects in Chapters 5 and 6.

5.2. Persuasion knowledge and relevance theory

Here is an illustration of how the persuasion knowledge model might work in a concrete case. A magazine reader flipping through the pages of a glossy travel monthly sees a six-page feature article on a sunny resort destination, complete with beautiful photography and an appealing story. Knowing that the magazine’s publisher is a travel-related credit card company, the reader tries to decide whether the feature is an article produced by the magazine’s editorial staff, or an “advertorial” produced for advertising purposes by the magazine’s publishers. It is important to establish the author’s intention: is it a piece of journalistic writing designed to recommend a glorious destination just discovered by the travel writer, or is it a promotional piece sponsored by the country’s tourism authority? If the piece was independently written, the reader may allow herself to be tempted to visit the destination; however, if the article turns out to be a piece of advertising, she will be more reluctant. She has at her disposal some previous knowledge about advertising and magazines: “magazines can carry both feature articles and sponsored pieces,” “this magazine is published by a credit card company,” “advertorials usually have a small-print identifier on the top outside corner of each page.” Her evaluation of the author’s intentions is both systematic (e.g. determining who the author

is), and heuristic (e.g. “advertorials are less believable than editorial pieces”).

From a relevance-theoretic perspective, persuasion knowledge of the systematic type might be seen as part of the context accessed by the audience and used as premises for the derivation of further cognitive effects. According to relevance theory, such knowledge is stored in memory and will be more or less activated in different situations (e.g. Sperber and Wilson, 1986, 1995, 87-88). For example, persuasion knowledge might be stored as encyclopedic knowledge under the heading “persuasion” with a sub-entry headed “advertising,” that is activated in the appropriate situation. In the example discussed above, the stimulus provided by the magazine article might activate the encyclopedic entry for “advertising,” which might contain information such as “advertising in magazines can take the form of an advertorial,” “advertorials are usually labeled as such on the outer top corner,” “other clues can usually be found such as a logo or a toll-free number to call.” This encyclopedic information will contribute to the context in which the stimulus is processed to allow the derivation of certain cognitive effects such as the adoption of an attitude of belief or skepticism about the reliability of the article.

Many heuristic processes would be seen, from a relevance-theoretic point of view, not as contextual processes, but as procedures or computations which compete for processing resources and may be more or less activated on different occasions. For instance, calibrating the degree of trust to place in a particular communicator (in this case, a travel writer) is quite a complex matter, and most people would be unable to spell out exactly how they do it. According to relevance theory, human cognition consists not only of explicit premises but also of spontaneous, automatic procedures, and this distinction might be worth exploring further in connection with models of systematic vs. heuristic processing.

According to Friestad and Wright, having identified a persuasion attempt, the target allocates cognitive resources to further process the stimulus in the context of three different types of knowledge: persuasion knowledge, topic knowledge and agent knowledge. Depending on the cognitive resources allocated to each of these domains, processing can take place more or less elaboratively or heuristically. The use of persuasion knowledge would involve an assessment of the persuasive tactic used, for instance the use of an advertorial and all the related effects. The use of knowledge about the topic might involve the retrieval of encyclopedic information about sunny resorts and holidays, and agent-related inferences would focus on the magazine, the writer and how much credibility to lend the article.

A key feature of the persuasion knowledge model is the “change of meaning principle.” According to Friestad and Wright,

“when a person begins conceiving of an agent’s action, heretofore not identified as having any particular meaning, as a persuasion tactic a “change of meaning” will occur” (Friestad and Wright 1994,13).

In other words, once the agent’s persuasive intention has been recognized, a persuasive attempt will be understood differently by the target. The effects of such a “change of meaning” range from “detachment,” in which the target “disengages” herself from the context created by the persuasion attempt, to “change of focus,” in which the target’s attention moves away from her topic knowledge to the domain of persuasion knowledge itself. In the example of the magazine article, these effects should take place, if the target decides that the piece is indeed a paid advertorial. Instead of being processed as an objective description of the resort, the article would activate the coping mechanisms typically used to deal with advertisements.

In relevance-theoretic terms, there is not really a change of meaning since the goal of the comprehension process is simply to identify the meaning the communicator overtly intended to convey. What changes is the degree of trust the audience places in the communicator and in the message: that is, it is a matter not of understanding, but of believing. In Section 4 of Chapter 1, I discussed the three different strategies of understanding proposed by Sperber (1994 a) and Wilson (1999). A hearer who realizes that the communicator may be deceptive, which may well happen if the hearer suspects that the communicator may have a persuasive intention, will adopt a strategy of “sophisticated understanding.” As a result, he will not stop at the first interpretation that is actually relevant enough (which would be sufficient if the hearer were “naively optimistic”), nor at the first interpretation that the communicator might have thought was relevant enough (the strategy of a “cautious optimist”), but rather, at the first interpretation that the communicator might have thought he would think was relevant enough. As noted in Chapter 1, each of these strategies requires an extra level of metarepresentation of the mental states of the communicator. In other words, the hearer’s recognition of the communicator’s persuasive intention does not “change meaning,” but motivates the hearer to consider the communicator’s ulterior motives, affecting not the content of the message, but its credibility, and therefore the achievement of the communicator’s ulterior goals.

5.3. Further research on the persuasion knowledge model

Following Friestad and Wright’s initial formulation of the persuasion knowledge model, a large amount of empirical work has been carried out, exploring different aspects and applications of the framework. Here I will briefly review three articles that are representative of this work, highlighting its potential links with the account of persuasion I am proposing.

Campbell and Kirmani (2000) investigate the application of persuasion knowledge to face-to-face interaction between a salesperson and a customer. They highlight the critical role played by the target's perception of the agent's persuasion motive in activating persuasion knowledge. Recognition of the agent's motive for making a persuasion attempt enhances the efficient application of persuasion knowledge. As persuasion motives become less recognizable, the cognitive capacity required to activate persuasion knowledge will increase. One of the studies uses the target's attribution of insincerity to an agent as a marker of the fact that persuasion knowledge has been applied. The subjects are asked to read short scenarios in which they imagine themselves in the role of a shopper interacting with a salesperson, or of a third party observing the interaction between the salesperson and the shopper. They are then asked to answer questions about the salesperson's motives. Two variables, recognizability of a persuasion motive and cognitive capacity are manipulated in each for each of the two roles (shopper and observer) played by the subjects. Cognitive capacity is simply manipulated by having the subjects perform other tasks while reading the role-playing scenarios. Recognizability of the salesperson's motives is manipulated by having the salesperson make flattering remarks before a decision to purchase (high recognizability), or after the decision has been taken (low recognizability). This study provides good evidence of the effects of the target recognizing the communicator's persuasive intention. In such situations, identification of the agent's persuasive intention facilitates the activation of persuasion knowledge. In cases where persuasion motives are not easily recognizable, greater cognitive resources will need to be used in order to detect them. This is clearly of interest in relation to our discussion of how the perception of a persuasive intention by the target relates to considerations of relevance, particularly on the processing effort side.

In a second article, the same authors (Kirmani and Campbell, 2004) discuss two possible types of roles that may be adopted by persuasion targets in interpersonal persuasion settings. Depending on their own interactional goals, targets may take on the role of either “goal seeker,” or “persuasion sentry,” according to Kirmani and Campbell. In an initial qualitative study, Kirmani and Campbell record a range of responses from targets participating in one-on-one persuasion episodes, and link these responses to the target’s own primary goal of either benefiting from the interaction (“goal seeker”), or protecting themselves against its risks (“persuasion sentry”). In a second, quantitative, study, the response types are correlated with different dimensions of the relationship between the two interlocutors, including their level of cooperation vs. competition, seen as indicating how mutually beneficial the relationship is perceived to be. Not surprisingly, the research shows a general tendency for cooperative relationships to be associated with a “goal seeker” strategy. These studies are of interest here for two reasons: they underline the dilemma faced by targets in seeking to reap the benefits of communication while minimizing its risks, and they provide a further bridge between persuasion knowledge and social intelligence by discussing persuasion strategies in terms of compatibility of the interlocutors’ goals. I will consider some of these issues further in my discussion of social intelligence in Chapter 4.

Finally, Williams et al. (2004) discuss a phenomenon previously documented in the social psychology literature, called “mere measurement effect.” According to this literature, the mere fact of asking an individual a question about how likely they are to engage in a given behavior tends to elicit an “overprediction of their likelihood to engage in the target behavior,” and, more crucially, a “greater likelihood to engage in the behavior itself” (Williams et al., 2004, 540). The issue is of concern to researchers setting up experimental conditions, as it suggests that the results can be biased by the mere fact of asking participants about their intentions.

Previous research has attributed this effect to a greater cognitive activation and accessibility of either the behavior pattern, or the attitude, or the type of object associated with the behavior (e.g., buying a certain good) (see Williams et al., 2004, 541 for discussion of previous research). Without denying these results, the authors argue convincingly that asking a target a question about whether they will perform an action may fail to activate an individual's defense mechanisms (and thus result in a greater likelihood of the individual engaging in the intended behavior). The reason why the individual's persuasion knowledge may fail to trigger a defense mechanism is that the individual does not attribute the question to a persuasive intention. In the present perspective, the study is interesting in two main ways. In the first place, it suggests a persuasive strategy that is rarely discussed in the literature, or among marketing professionals, and whose effectiveness has therefore not yet been mitigated by exposure. In the second place, it shows the effects that result from the persuasive intention being recognized. Finally, the findings suggest that a coping strategy that relies on "recognizing the other's persuasive intention," or "recognizing previously encountered persuasion strategies" may be insufficient at times.

6. Conclusion

This review of research on persuasion by social psychologists provides a clearer picture of some of the mechanisms involved in persuasive communication. These mechanisms have been explored in diverse frameworks, yielding more agreement than disagreement, and pointing to several key features on which to build a broader cognitive account of persuasion. An important point of agreement between the frameworks is the role given to two key parameters: the motivation for targets of persuasion to come to valid conclusions (the so-called "accuracy" motivation), and the pressure for "frugality" in the use of cognitive

resources. These two considerations are critically linked to rationality considerations, as I will argue in the next chapter. It is worth noting that accuracy and frugality also feature prominently in Bratman's planning theory, as well as in the general functions of communication discussed in Chapter 2, and of course, in relevance theory (see discussion of the accuracy goal in Section 3.1 of this chapter). The importance of these two features in these very different theoretical frameworks is certainly not coincidental: as just noted, both are linked to rationality considerations and represent the motivational and cognitive sides of persuasion. I will argue that rationality considerations explain the importance of accuracy and frugality in the general model of persuasion which I am developing: one that sees both the communicator and the target as seeking a balance between reaping the benefits of communication and minimizing the cost of shielding oneself from the risks of communication. I will examine these issues of rationality in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

PERSUADING RATIONALLY

1. Introduction

In the preceding chapters, I introduced the idea that a persuasive communicator, in order to achieve her intention to persuade, in fact relies on her target adopting or modifying an intention of his own. In adopting an intention, the target commits to the performance of certain actions in a way that is coherent and consistent with his own planning structure (Bratman, 1987). The communicator undergoes a parallel process while aiming to fulfill her intention to persuade by producing a persuasive utterance.

A discussion of persuasion in rational terms may seem somewhat puzzling to readers whose intuitive notion of persuasion may give a greater role to desires and emotions than to rationality in affecting a target's course of action. Such an intuition is hardly surprising in the context of marketing campaigns that do indeed seem to call upon consumers' emotions rather than on rational behavior. I do not believe that there is a serious tension between my rationality-based account and accounts involving persuasive appeals to emotions and desires for two main reasons. The first is that practical reasoning and rationality, as I discuss them here, using Bratman's framework, are closely linked to desires. Indeed, the assumption is that all practical reasoning processes are heavily influenced by desires. Desires, as we have seen, play an important role in Bratman's framework, as inputs to practical reasoning processes and as part of the background against which our intentions are screened for consistency and coherence. Our rationality norms, he reminds us, are "grounded in a basic concern with (rational)

desire-satisfaction together with an appreciation both of our limits and of the associated fact that we are not time-slice agents” (Bratman, 1987, 109). The second, partly-related reason, involves the critical role of bounded rationality in the proposed account. I will discuss bounded rationality and the part it plays in persuasion in Section 3 below, and argue that both emotions and desires do indeed contribute to persuasion in an adaptive and rational way (see Mellers et al., 2002).

The requirement that an individual’s intentions and actions should fit in with his background attitudes and desires places constraints on what each interlocutor may be expected to “give and take” in a communicative interaction. In this chapter, I will consider how these constraints may operate in the context of persuasion. Apart from the general practical reasoning processes that lead to the adoption of intentions, Bratman discusses the deliberative processes that can lead to the reconsideration of intentions and the norms that constrain such deliberations. My aim in this chapter is to show how these processes and constraints enable individuals to take advantage of communication to fulfill their higher-order intentions to their own advantage. After presenting more details of the proposed account of persuasion, I will discuss the normative aspects of Bratman’s framework, including the nature of bounded rationality, which I see as reflected in the use of heuristic strategies in persuasion. I will then discuss the rationality issues raised by the adoption of such strategies: what makes them effective, and what is their role in promoting or compromising individual rationality in persuasive situations? This discussion will set the stage for a broader examination of persuasion in the context of cultural transmission in Chapter 5.

2. Why persuasion?

Let's briefly review the picture that is emerging from our study of persuasion so far. In Chapters 1 and 2, I discussed how interlocutors take account of each other's goals as they try to benefit from a communicative exchange. At the end of Chapter 3, I brought the picture into sharper focus by highlighting the importance of accuracy and frugality as parameters in persuasion. I will now consider persuasion as a rational communicative phenomenon, in which individuals exploit the cognitive functions of communication, the accuracy and frugality demands of rationality and the interactive and cultural benefits of social exchanges in order to fulfill their persuasive intentions. The full picture I paint will rely on relevance considerations at every step of the communicative and practical reasoning processes. As I argued in Chapter 1, what makes it reasonable for an audience to attend to a communicative stimulus is an expectation of relevance. As we have seen in the first three chapters, competent persuasive communicators must also build enough intention-relevance into their persuasive stimuli to ensure fulfillment of their persuasive intention. Thus, both communication and practical reasoning are constrained by considerations of relevance.

It is important at this point to recall the distinction I introduced early in Chapter 2 between a persuasive intention and a mere desire to persuade. Having a persuasive intention commits the communicator to take the steps necessary to fulfill her intention and guides her practical reasoning in this way (Bratman, 1987). A mere desire, while it may lead the communicator to inform others that she regards a certain state of affairs as desirable, will not actually drive the practical reasoning process. A communicator with a persuasive intention should adopt any available rational means to fulfill her intention. If a communicator has no persuasive intention, the utterance must be motivated by some other type of higher-order intention, whatever

this may be. In Bratman's terms, a desire, rather than an intention, to persuade is present when the individual's pro-attitude towards the desired action is weaker (than in the case of intention) when she has not fully committed to this pro-attitude in such a way as to make sure the desired action will happen, or when she has not yet figured out how to make it happen. In each of these cases, the desire to persuade is simply part of the background against which intentions are evaluated.

In Chapter 2, I highlighted the importance of this distinction between intentions and desires in discussing Bratman's planning theory, Searle's notion of causal self-referentiality of intentions, and the developmental and folk-theoretical evidence on how intentions are detected. I used the example to illustrate the distinction:

- (1) Context: First day of a new school year. Father says to child:
"You're not going to need your teddy bear to help you read this year, are you?"
- (2) Father's description of (1): I persuaded her to leave her teddy bear at home by asking her whether she needed her teddy bear to help her read.
- (3) More detailed reading of (1), as described in (2): The father intended to persuade the child to leave her teddy bear at home and got her to do so by asking her whether she needed her teddy bear to help her read. Motivated by her desire to start reading, the child chose to leave the teddy bear at home.
- (4) Alternative reading of (1): The father intended to persuade the child to start reading on her own. He asked her whether she needed her teddy bear to help her read. She ended up leaving

her teddy bear at home, something the father had wanted her to do for a long time.

I argued then that the distinction between a persuasive intention and a desire to persuade has important implications for our understanding of persuasion. These include implications for the rationality considerations that guide persuasive communication.

2.1. Persuasion and practical reasoning

Having adopted an intention to modify her audience's behavior in a certain way, a communicator should seek to fulfill this intention by adopting lower-order intentions consistent with her background of beliefs, desires and other assumptions, including representations of some of the audience's own beliefs, desires and intentions. Among the communicator's background beliefs is likely to be the assumption that changing the behavior of others by using brute force or other coercive means is not a possible option, either for moral reasons, or because it clashes with the social or cultural goals of pursuing productive rather than destructive relationships. I will discuss these social and cultural goals in more detail later in the chapter, and in Chapter 5. As a result of these considerations, the communicator may settle on the use of persuasion, which involves the cooperative modification of someone's intentions via communication, as the rational alternative to brute force or coercion. Young children, as they learn that they cannot directly modify others' behavior, either physically or by demanding it with all their might, typically exhibit great frustration. As soon as they begin to use the more effective and cooperative strategy of persuasion, they quickly master many of its features. Using persuasive communication can be seen as a rational strategy that adopts the goal of affecting the beliefs, intentions or desires of others as an alternative to the

unacceptably effortful, and seldom attainable, strategy of forcing others to change their behavior.

A rational persuasive communicator seeks to fulfill her intention by producing an utterance (or other communicative stimulus) that her audience will perceive as relevant: relevant enough to bring about the fulfillment of her communicative and informative intentions, and furthermore intention-relevant enough to bring about the fulfillment of her persuasive intention. I introduced the notion of intention-relevance as a particular type of relevance in Chapter 2. An input to cognitive processes is intention-relevant if it affects the individual's intentions structure by leading to the addition of new intentions or increasing its coherence with existing beliefs and desires. The greater the alteration, and the less processing required to bring it about, the greater the intention-relevance of the input to the individual at that time. Such inputs can be derived, through communication, as in the case of persuasion, or be developed internally via practical reasoning and the search for solutions to the means-end coherence problems posed by one's existing intentions. These problems are caused by existing higher-order intentions for which one has yet to find a practical solution, namely an intention and its corresponding action that are compatible and coherent with one's planning structure and that will serve to fulfill the higher-order intention.

2.2. Persuasion and intention-relevance

According to the communicative principle of relevance, a communicative stimulus carries the presumption of optimal relevance, i.e., a presumption that it will be at least relevant enough to be worth processing and, moreover, be the most relevant stimulus "compatible with the communicator's abilities and preferences" (Sperber and Wilson, 1995, 270). Communication is itself embedded in a broader cognitive framework governed by a general cognitive principle of relevance (Sperber and

Wilson, 1995, 260) which claims that “human cognition tends to be geared to the maximization of relevance.” As a result, the conclusions an audience will derive from a stimulus are somewhat predictable to communicators. Thus, the crafting of a persuasive stimulus, starting with the selection of persuasion as a strategy, the selection of a persuasive tactic and the formulation and production of the utterance itself, are guided by the cognitive and communicative principles of relevance, both generalizations about evolved properties of our cognitive system.

In settling on persuasion as a strategy, the communicator relies on her knowledge that affecting the target’s intentions which are conduct-controlling and constitute a commitment to action, will affect his course of action. The communicator counts on cooperation, or at least the appearance of cooperation, to achieve the intended effects. The cooperative aspect of persuasion consists in the communicator offering the target a possible solution to a problem caused by his existing intention structure. Such problems might include the target’s unfulfilled need or desire to learn to read, to buy a toothpaste that whitens teeth, or to resolve his ambivalence about a possible war. These problems may be more or less salient for the target at a given time, and the possible solution offered by the communicator may actually serve the communicator’s own interests more than the target’s. For instance, a target might have a background problem, or unresolved intention, of wishing to be accepted within a social circle. This problem might not be particularly salient most of the time, but might be activated when presented with the option of holidaying in a resort favored by members of the desirable circle. I will leave for later discussion questions about whether the communicator’s intention is genuinely cooperative, and whose interest is really served by the target’s potential adoption of the new or revised intention. Offering a solution to a problem with very low salience, and one that clearly serves the communicator’s

interests more than the target's is probably less than fully cooperative, at least to the outside observer.

Alternatives to persuasion might be non-cooperative attempts to modify the target's intentions, by issuing a command or order, physically coercing him, or directly modifying his actions by disabling his own will, e.g., by using drugs or hypnosis. These alternatives rely on other strategies, such as fear, physical discomfort or mind-altering agents, rather than cooperation, to modify the target's intentions. Thus, cases in which an agent wants to modify the target's intentions can vary greatly, from a dictator wanting to control the population of his country to a moviegoer seeking to persuade her date to see an adventure film rather than a documentary.

2.3. Competent persuasion

Choosing between persuasion and other non-cooperative strategies may involve an elaborative reasoning process, or may be less effortful decision. As discussed in Chapter 3, communicators who have developed the competence to use persuasion effectively may use a more or less automatic routine. Modifying others' intentions or preferences under routine circumstances (such as the moviegoer's situation rather than the dictator's) is a common task, for which we have a simple tried-and-true solution that does not require much reasoning: "produce an utterance that offers the audience a solution to their own planning problems," in other words, "use persuasion." This is preferable on efficiency grounds to alternatives such as, for instance, reviewing the pros and cons of ordering the hearer at gunpoint to see a given film, giving him enough to drink that he will not know what film he is seeing, or finding enough arguments in favor of adventure films vs. documentaries. Selecting persuasion is opting for a cooperative strategy, albeit at times for non-altruistic purposes. By supplying a missing piece of the target's planning structure, the persuasive communicator, at the very least appears to be cooperative. The ability to

use these strategies competently is part of what Friestad and Wright (1994) characterize as the persuasion knowledge model.

Before considering the communicator's next step in the practical reasoning process, selecting a persuasive tactic, I want to introduce the notions of bounded rationality and heuristics in greater detail, as they play a critical role in discussing how a communicator chooses persuasion over alternative, more coercive strategies. Bounded rationality and heuristics help to explain the selection of persuasive tactics, as I will show in Section 2.3, and must be discussed further before I consider their applicability to persuasion.

3. Decisions under uncertainty and bounded rationality

The term "bounded rationality" was first used by Herbert Simon (1955). Simon contrasted "actual human decision-making" with the type of "rational decision-making" that was hypothesized at the time in economic theory, based on the assumption that individuals have unlimited time and cognitive resources, and perfect knowledge of all relevant facts. Two types of constraints on human decision-making make the appeal to "rational decision-making" (as then conceived) unrealistic. First, there are constraints on the available cognitive resources, and second, most individuals are not aware of all the relevant facts. These constraints make it impractical at best, and often impossible, to make decisions using Bayesian standards of rationality, according to which humans compute specific probabilities for future events based on a formal probability calculus. Instead, according to Simon, humans have developed bounded rationality strategies that enable them to make fast decisions with limited cognitive resources and less-than-perfect information.

3.1. Descriptive and normative aspects of bounded rationality

Over the last decade, following in Simon's footsteps, Gigerenzer and his colleagues (e.g., Gigerenzer and Todd, 1999; Gigerenzer and Selten, 2001), have described and analyzed a number of strategies which help individuals to take advantage of regularities in decision-making environments. These strategies enable individuals to make reliable decisions with remarkable efficiency. Because they are based on regularities in particular situations, these strategies are often highly domain-specific, and do not usually help in different situations. Together, these adaptive strategies constitute what Gigerenzer and his colleagues call the adaptive toolbox, a set of tools that has been seen as playing an important role in cognition in general, and particularly in the domains of social intelligence (e.g., Gigerenzer, 1997) and cultural transmission (Henrich et al., 2001). Here is an example of one of these strategies, as described by Gigerenzer (2001b):

- (5) The LEX strategy: A consumer faced with a choice of 5 car models will identify the attribute that is most important to her and evaluate the 5 models for that attribute. If this produces a tie, she will move on to the second most important attribute. Let's say her top attribute is safety; she will select the model that has the highest safety record. If two models are close on this attribute (exhibiting a "just noticeable difference"), she will move on to the next attribute, say, price, and select accordingly.

Many of the strategies described by Gigerenzer and his colleagues incorporate a "satisficing," or "stopping" rule defined by a satisfaction threshold which, once it is reached, will signal the end of the search. In the car buying example, above, deciding that I will buy whichever model is

available immediately in the lime green color would be a satisficing strategy.

While the existence of cognitive and environmental constraints cannot be denied, the view that heuristic strategies are the powerful and adaptive tools suggested by Gigerenzer and his colleagues is far from being unanimously accepted. An alternative view was defended by Tversky and Kahneman (1982) whose pioneering work on the use of heuristics thoroughly documented not only their effectiveness, but also the biases and fallacies they engender. In sharp contrast to Gigerenzer's view that heuristics can improve rationality, Tversky and Kahneman see them as risky strategies with hidden costs. The two groups present their contrasting views in a pair of 1996 articles (Kahneman and Tversky, 1996; Gigerenzer, 1996). Here is an illustration of the conflicting arguments, using the LEX strategy described above:

- (6) The use of the LEX strategy based on the "just noticeable difference" may lead up to a "decision error," (Payne and Bettman, 2001, 127). If three of the car models A, B and C, rank $A > B$, $B > C$ on the safety issue, with "just noticeable differences" between each pair, they are considered tied on safety. The decision-maker then moves to the second attribute, price, and could end up with a final decision of $C > A$ if A were ranked last on the price attribute. According to Payne and Bettman, this is considered a decision error as it breaks the Bayesian transitivity rule according to which, if A ranks higher than B (albeit marginally), which ranks higher than C, then A must rank higher than C.

The issue, according to Tversky and Kahneman, is one of normativity: what **ought** a rational individual do? While heuristic strategies may well describe what individuals actually do, they do not necessarily reflect what

rational individuals should do. Tversky and Kahneman argue that we need a better understanding of the strategies, their domains of application and their potential flaws in order to counteract the risks involved.

Gigerenzer rejects Bayesian calculus rules such as transitivity on the ground that they are unrealistic. Because they are based on the false premise that humans naturally assign probabilities to individual events, such rules are inadequate and should not be used. In fact, the problem is that there is no shared “gold standard” of what constitutes rational decision-making under uncertainty. The 1996 debate often becomes bogged down in terminological and methodological squabbles, and seems to disregard the important descriptive points on which the two schools do agree (see Samuels et al., 2002 for discussion)¹.

Gigerenzer’s general point is that the norm against which heuristic strategies should be evaluated is not some domain-general notion of Bayesian rationality, but rather their efficiency in adapting to specific decision-making situations. Some of these adaptive strategies may fail to yield the expected “rational” decision because they favor social intelligence demands, for instance, over abstract rationality (Gigerenzer, 1997, 283). This view has clear implications for the study of persuasion, as I have described it so far. I agree with Gigerenzer on this general point and believe that heuristic strategies, properly applied within the correct domain, are often indeed more rational than effortful, cumbersome analytical strategies. In Gigerenzer’s words:

“If short-sighted evolution has equipped us with simple
satisficing algorithms rather than with the collected works of

¹ A subsequent paper by Payne and Bettman (2001), whose work had been associated with the “biases” school, appears in a volume edited by Gigerenzer and endorses the adaptive approach while still pointing out the shortcomings of particular heuristic strategies, signaling, it seems, a rapprochement between the two schools.

logic and probability theory, this result indicates that we need not necessarily worry about human rationality.” (Gigerenzer, 1997, 280).

The point is that the standard must be shifted away from Bayesian rationality to a wider notion of adaptive or ecological rationality. Peter Todd (2001) takes the argument one step further, proposing that from a phylogenetic perspective, the use of heuristic strategies is driven by environmental limitations, i.e., the unavailability of perfect information, rather than by purely cognitive limitations. In his view, if cognitive limitations were the problem, humans would have evolved larger brains rather than efficient processing strategies that make up for less than perfect information.

3.2. Fast and frugal strategies

Gigerenzer and his colleagues introduce the term “fast and frugal strategies” to describe a wide range of different procedures incorporating satisficing and heuristic mechanisms. Strategies that involve a search for alternatives or a choice set are described as satisficing, while strategies that involve a search for cues that can be used to evaluate a choice set are described as heuristics. Gigerenzer and his colleagues (2001) contrast satisficing strategies with less efficient “optimization” strategies. When using an optimization strategy, a decision-maker searches through all the possible solutions before selecting the one with the optimal outcome. Although it is less efficient than heuristics or satisficing because it requires a search for all solutions, optimization is often mistakenly referred to as an efficient “shortcut” strategy, according to Gigerenzer.

In general, fast and frugal strategies share three features:

- (a) They reflect psychological reality: the strategy used reflects the cognitive limitations it circumvents.
- (b) They are domain specific: the strategy is highly specialized and functions within a well-defined domain.
- (c) They are ecologically rational: the strategy's success depends on how well it adapts to the environment.

The relevance-theoretic comprehension procedure described by Wilson and Sperber (2002), and discussed in Chapter 1 above, might be seen as a heuristic strategy in that it “considers interpretive hypotheses in order of accessibility, and stops when expectations of relevance are satisfied.” (ibid., 259). The cue used to evaluate the range of hypotheses is the expectation of relevance raised by the utterance. This procedure is an instance of a heuristic strategy rather than satisficing, as it involves the use of a criterion of evaluation (expected relevance), rather than a threshold². An optimization version of comprehension would claim that a hearer reviews all possible interpretations before selecting the most relevant. Because such optimization strategies do not include a stopping rule, there is no way of knowing when all interpretations have indeed been reviewed. Moreover, every utterance has an indefinite range of possible interpretations, depending on the contextual assumptions used. This is clearly not a rational or efficient option.

3.3. Bounded rationality and social intelligence

Social intelligence plays a big part in shaping fast and frugal strategies, and these strategies, in turn, are an important element of social intelligence. I introduced the notion of social intelligence in Chapter 3 in my discussion

² This point was clarified by Deirdre Wilson.

of Peter Wright's "marketplace metacognition" and Friestad and Wright's persuasion knowledge model. The idea is that humans have evolved specific abilities to enable them to persuade, to cope with persuasion and to try to stay ahead of each other by using persuasion to their own ends. The point is developed in the context of a broader discussion of evolutionary social cognition by Dan Sperber (e.g., 2000 a). According to Sperber, the "persuasion/counterpersuasion arms race" (Sperber, 2000 a, 136) results from, and in turn creates a pressure to evolve ever-more sophisticated manipulative skills. These include "argumentative displays," spelling out the evidence for a certain conclusion, and "consistency checkers," enabling the evaluation of such arguments. These skills may first make their appearance as the result of effortful, elaborative processes, but evolve into fast and frugal strategies under the ever-growing pressure of the "arms race" or of "marketplace" forces.

An integral part of the social (or Machiavellian) intelligence hypothesis discussed by Whiten, Byrne and others (Byrne and Whiten, 1988; Whiten and Byrne, 1997) is the structure of social intelligence. Social intelligence is seen as made up of domain-specific modules for cooperation, cheater-detection, negotiation, mate selection, and so on, that have evolved as a result of specific pressures, taking advantage of regularities in a particular domain, and providing efficient strategies for coping with these pressures in one's own best interest.

Recent work on social intelligence and cognitive modularity has explored a range of social abilities with a view to understanding which of them exhibit modular features. For instance, McCabe and Smith (2001) suggest that there may be a goodwill accounting module, which might keep track of the "personal capital" of people or groups with whom we come in contact: it would add points for evidence of trustworthiness, and remove points for deception or other negative behavior. Such a module would certainly make cooperation and reciprocity easier and less risky. Because humans rely on

their social environment as a particularly fruitful source of information about the world, there is a pressure to use both casual communication and more focused social learning or transmission mechanisms to yield information as efficiently and reliably as possible. Here, strategies that allow individuals to quickly identify better information sources or more effective behaviors would be of great benefit. On the other hand, relying on these strategies leaves the individual more exposed to manipulation. I will explore such mechanisms in Chapter 5.

4. Communicating to persuade

I will now continue my analysis of the communicator's practical reasoning process, locating it within the broader domain of social intelligence. According to my analysis, cooperative persuasion involves the choice of a persuasion tactic and the use of this tactic to formulate an utterance that will convey the communicator's informative intention, including the information that the targeted action is desirable. Let's review the steps by which this is done.

4.1. Persuasive tactics and social intelligence

Having decided to modify a target's behavior through the use of persuasion, the communicator can select what she sees as the most effective persuasive tactic for use with that target and in that situation. Here, the communicator is faced with a familiar and often well-rehearsed choice of tactics, and may proceed to review the advantages and disadvantages of each more or less automatically, or settle on a tactic that fits her persuasive intention and the target's intention structure. At this point, the range of possible tactics is made available by the communicator's persuasion knowledge model, developed through experience as both communicator and as target of persuasive acts. One option for the communicator would

be to expose the target to a detailed argument in favor of adopting the proposed intention or action; another would be to take advantage of the target's existing intention structure by offering her a way of fulfilling some of her currently unfulfilled intentions. These two options correspond to the two routes to persuasion discussed in the elaboration likelihood model (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986) and the heuristic systematic model (Chaiken et al., 1989), as reviewed in Chapter 3.

Some of the targeted elements in the audience's planning structure may be fairly general strategies such as modeling one's actions after those of prestigious characters, conforming to the behavior of a majority of individuals, or directing one's actions to the acquisition of scarce resources. All these strategies can, in turn, be partially fulfilled by the adoption of lower-order intentions. More importantly, these strategies have a common feature: they are all "fast and frugal" strategies, adopted by individuals in search of efficient, adaptive solutions to specific types of decisions under uncertainty. I will argue in the remainder of this chapter and in Chapter 5 that it is the fast and frugal nature of these strategies that makes them ideal engines of persuasion when targeted competently by persuasive communicators.

In Chapter 3, I discussed research by Cialdini (1993, 2001) in which he identified six main categories of persuasive tactics used by professional persuaders. I now want to make two claims about these tactics: (1) they are indeed "fast and frugal" tactics, used by competent persuaders intending to facilitate their targets' practical reasoning by solving their means-end coherence problems and encouraging them to adopt specific intentions; and (2) they are all based on broader tactics used in the domain of social intelligence, which have evolved in response to more general social pressures. I will consider each of Cialdini's tactics in turn:

(a) “Social proof”: The use of this type of tactic relies on the adaptive tendency of humans to conform to the behavior of large groups, or of the majority in a group. An individual adopts a given intention because it enables him to conform in this way, or chooses the more conforming of two possible courses of action. The importance of this conformist tendency in facilitating cultural transmission has been emphasized (Boyd and Richerson, 1985; Henrich and Boyd, 1998) as it “increases the probability of acquiring adaptive beliefs and values.” (Henrich and Boyd, 1998, 215). Simply put, the frequency of occurrence of a particular behavior is used as a heuristic indication of its quality. A persuasive tactic can then be produced that takes advantage of this tendency in order to modify the target’s intentions and preferences. Appealing to a target’s natural and adaptive tendency to conform to a particular group’s behavior is an effective persuasive tactic. Examples abound: “Nine out of 10 families prefer X toothpaste,” “I’ve got to go to the party, everyone else is going,” “Join the millions of satisfied customers who’ve switched from X to Y.”

(b) “Commitment and consistency”: By choosing this type of a tactic, the persuader appeals specifically to the target’s need for consistency and commitment in practical reasoning. The persuader simply points out the consistency between an existing intention or commitment of the target’s, and the proposed intention.

Consistency with a previous commitment can function heuristically as a cue for acceptability. For instance, in attempting to persuade a skeptical population of the need for war against an enemy state, a government may attempt to establish links between the enemy state and terrorist groups. The aim here is to use the widely held commitment against terrorism to build a broad commitment against

the enemy state. Similar instances of this tactic are used by communicators who try to persuade their audiences one small step at a time, seeking some token commitment at each step. This tactic is commonly used by charity organizations that first seek small pledges, and gradually increase their appeals. Young children also use this tactic successfully (“I want to stay up for five more minutes?... (later) Another ten minutes? ... (later) It’s almost the end of the show!”).

- (c) “Reciprocity”: In their work on reciprocity, Bowles and Gintis (1999) show how individuals engage in both positive reciprocal behavior (responding cooperatively to altruism), and negative reciprocal behavior (retaliating, sometimes at a cost to themselves, in the face of defection). In using reciprocity as a persuasive tactic, a communicator is creating the expectation of some form of reward to herself (the target’s cooperation) in exchange for her altruistic action towards the target. The interaction is crafted in such a way that the expected reward is the target adopting the intention and undertaking the action which will fulfill the persuader’s persuasive intention. This is the tactic behind such marketing programs as free giveaways, tryout offers, supermarket samples, etc. Especially when the free item is handed out personally, this tactic encourages the target to reciprocate by purchasing the item or service. In non-marketing settings, it can involve gift-giving or other material exchange, but can also take the form of a seemingly gratuitous compliment or apology, in response to which the target may reciprocate by fulfilling the communicator’s persuasive intention. A teacher might use this tactic in saying: “I know a good boy who is going to put all his books away quickly.”

(d) “Liking”: People tend to agree more with people whom they like, associate with or are attracted to. This tendency is naturally linked to adaptive behavior in that it also facilitates cultural transmission in a trusting relationship. Persuasive communicators project a likeable image, proffer compliments, seek sympathy and in general aim to generate positive emotional responses from their targets. For instance: well-liked figures such as popular or attractive film stars are selected (or self-selected) as political spokespersons; young, endearing children recommend laundry products to their mothers in television advertisements.

(e) “Authority”: Similarly, authority or prestige figures are recognized as offering more advantageous information and this tendency is observed throughout evolution. In Chapter 5, I will discuss work by Henrich and Gil-White (2001) in which they show the use of a prestige bias in cultural transmission. A persuasive tactic based on this bias allows communicators to increase their persuasiveness by establishing themselves as authorities in specific areas. Marketing stimuli relying on claims of authority, and/or on prestige are ubiquitous: endorsements, expert panels, retired politicians take to the airwaves to argue for or against war, etc.

(f) “Scarcity”: Any indication that the availability of a particular option may be restricted (e.g., goods are offered for a limited periods or in limited quantity) makes it appear more attractive. The ability to detect such scarcity is naturally adaptive: securing access to limited supplies of food or restricted information has been critical in human evolution. Examples of this persuasive tactic abound: “while supplies last” sales, “exclusive” press coverage, “confidential” information, etc.

The common feature in all these tactics is that they affect the audience's practical reasoning processes by appealing to powerful triggers of adaptive behavior which motivate the adoption of a new or modified intention. In my view, Cialdini's list should include one more tactic: the use of elaborative argumentation, which is often deployed with the intention of eliciting heuristic rather than effortful processing. In other words, a persuasive communicator may well present a full-fledged argument in order to impress the target audience into believing that the arguments are compelling.

There is thus a clear pattern showing that adaptive social intelligence heuristics are exploited by competent persuasive communicators. I will argue in Chapter 5 that this pattern reflects an even broader tendency for adaptive mechanisms to be co-opted for use beyond their proper domain to fulfill the higher-order intentions of communicators, a phenomenon discussed by Sperber (forthcoming b). In the case of persuasion, the fact that Cialdini's categories coincide with specific adaptive tendencies does not mean that these particular tactics will be effective forever. Because of the pressures exerted by the persuasion/counterpersuasion arms race, the effectiveness of these tactics is likely to diminish with time, opening the way for other tactics, which may exploit other tendencies.

4.2. Representation and intention-relevance

I have tried to show throughout this thesis that persuasion is rarely achieved simply by a persuasive intention expressing the intention to persuade, as illustrated in (7). In many cases, this would actually jeopardize its chances of fulfillment. We therefore need to consider how the formation of a particular persuasive intention can lead to the eventual production of an utterance such as (8).

(7) I intend to persuade you to leave your teddy bear at home.

(8) You don't need your teddy bear's help to read, this year, do you?

I have argued that one step might be to adopt the strategy of “breaking into” the target's practical reasoning processes to make the hoped-for action desirable enough to lead to the formation of an intention to perform it. I have also discussed some of the specific tactics that may be employed in implementing this strategy. Let's consider how these ideas can be developed further by analyzing the inferential steps that might lead to the production of (8).

The father starts by entertaining a representation of a particular state of affairs that he regards as desirable, as shown in (9):

(9) It is desirable to Dad [for Sarah to leave her teddy bear home].

Assuming that coercion has been ruled out, in order to get Sarah to leave her teddy bear at home, he must make it seem a desirable course of action for her (desirable enough and consistent enough with her existing planning structure to lead her to form the intention to act), as represented in (10):

(10) It is desirable to Sarah [for Sarah to leave her teddy bear home].

This leads the father to add a new representation to his planning structure, as shown in (11):

(11) It is desirable to Dad that it be [desirable to Sarah [for Sarah to leave her teddy bear home]].

How is this desirable state of affairs achieved? In this case the father decides to apply a tactic of consistency with the child's existing planning structure, including her desire to read on her own, as represented in (12):

(12) It is desirable to Sarah [for Sarah to read without any help]].

The utterance in (13) suggests to the child that taking the teddy bear to school is inconsistent with this desire:

(13) You don't want your teddy bear's help to read, this year, do you?

Rhetorically, this yes/no question is in a form that expects the answer "no." In the terms of Wilson and Sperber (1988a), it is used "interpretively" to represent the answer which the father would regard as relevant, and therefore desirable:

(14) I don't want my teddy bear's help to read this year.

In order to resist this persuasion attempt, the child would therefore have to refuse to supply the expected answer (thus contradicting her own desire in (12)), and also go against her father's clearly indicated wishes.

4.3. Persuasive intention, informative intention and desire

This example can also be used to further illustrate the distinction (introduced in Chapter 2 and discussed again at the beginning of this chapter) between a persuasive intention and a desire. In uttering (13), the father is not overtly informing the child of his intention to have her leave the teddy bear at home. However, he is overtly informing her of one of his desires, to encourage her to read alone. This desire is, of course, consistent with the father's persuasive intention as shown in (11). Moreover, (13) informs the child of her father's desire to see her read without her teddy bear, and this may provide an added incentive for her to leave the bear at

home. Thus, according to my analysis of this example, the straightforward expression of the father's desire to see the child leave her teddy bear at home would not count as persuasive communication, but the expression of the father's desire to see the child read alone would count as persuasion (given the persuasive intention shown in (11)).

While informing a target of a related desire may be part of a communicator's persuasive tactic, as in this example, this is not always necessary to persuasion. There are many persuasive tactics that do not involve informing the target of a related desire of the communicator's. However, cases, such as (13), in which the expression of a desire is used as a persuasive tactic allow us to explore the relationship between persuasive intentions and informative intentions. Clearly, if the child continues to take the teddy bear to school after the father utters (13), his persuasive intention remains unfulfilled, regardless of whether his desire to encourage the child to read on her own, and the informative intention that conveys it are fulfilled or not. Thus, the father might comment, as in (15) below:

(15) I was unable to persuade her to leave her teddy bear home.
She started reading on her own, but the teddy bear still had to
be in her backpack in school everyday.

Similarly, if the child eventually leaves her teddy bear at home, but not as a result of the persuasive intention or the utterance in (13), this is also a case of unsuccessful persuasion. Thus, the father might comment, as in (16) below:

(16) I was unable to persuade her to leave her teddy bear home.
But the teacher asked children to stop bringing stuffed animals
to school, and she then left it at home.

These examples provide further evidence that the critical functions of what I have called persuasive intentions are linked to their status as

intentions. Most of the properties of intentions discussed in Chapter 2 (e.g., the fact that they represent a commitment, their causal self-referentiality and their role as inputs and outputs of practical reasoning processes) are all confirmed here. One feature of intentions which is not as clearly reflected in this illustration is the folk-theoretic idea that the intended action should be performed, or at least controlled by the agent who has the intention (Malle and Knobe, 2001). As discussed in Chapter 2, Section 4.2, Malle and Knobe claim that naïve perceivers tend not attribute intentionality to agents who have no control over the performance of the hoped-for action (and provide some empirical evidence for this claim). However, it seems that there might be some variation in the acceptability of utterances testing this claim. While (17) is clearly acceptable to some, it was slightly problematic for others³:

(17) ?I intend you to leave your teddy bear at home.

This suggests that there may be degrees of acceptability, reflecting the fact that, as the intended state of affairs gets further outside the communicator's control, it becomes less rational for the agent to form an intention about it. Thus, while several people asked informally found (18) acceptable for a parent to utter about her own child, (19) was found less acceptable and was thought by more than one person to imply that the speaker had found a solution to world hunger and poverty:

(18) I intend this child to be well-fed and safely housed.

(19) ?I intend every child in Africa to be well-fed and safely housed.

³ These judgments of acceptability were elicited informally among native English-speaking acquaintances.

If there are indeed certain intentions which it is rational for an agent to hold with only partial control of the outcome, we might expect that intentions to persuade might fall under this type: the communicator intends for the target to perform a certain action and controls the outcome to some extent as a competent persuasive communicator. This issue of intention and control reflects the complex interface between the communicator's and the target's rational considerations in persuasive communication: issues which we will now explore further.

5. The audience's perspective

The adoption or modification of an intention as the result of a persuasive stimulus also involves a process of practical reasoning. As shown in my discussion of heuristic strategies, the audience may adopt such intentions as the result of either an elaborative inferential process or a more automatic heuristic process. It is worth noting that the communicator's adoption of a particular heuristic tactic does not dictate that the hearer will use the same tactic in processing the persuasive stimulus or engaging in further practical reasoning. For instance, a communicator may intend to persuade his target by using a "liking" tactic which leads the target to engage in effortful consideration of why this tactic was used, although the outcome still is a case of successful persuasion.

5.1. Belief production

Just as the production of a persuasive utterance is the outcome of a multi-step process for the communicator, the processing of a persuasive stimulus is a multi-step process for the hearer. The first step is the comprehension process geared to identifying the speaker's meaning. Following Sperber and Wilson (2002), I see this as involving a fast and frugal strategy, as discussed in Section 3.2 above. Having identified the speaker's meaning,

the hearer may or may not believe her, thus fulfilling or failing to fulfill the communicator's informative intention. He may also draw further conclusions of his own. Thus there may be a substantial difference between the cognitive effects the communicator intended to achieve and those that actually result from the hearer processing the utterance.

Belief production is an important element of persuasion, whatever the framework used. Beliefs are produced when an individual acquires information by perceiving or experiencing an event, when he derives new conclusions from existing assumptions, or when information is communicated by others. In each case, the information may be processed immediately and/or stored in the agent's encyclopedic memory for future processing.

Assumptions, in general, are entertained with different degrees of confidence, characterized in relevance theory as their strength. The initial strength of an assumption depends on how it was acquired. Assumptions acquired through direct observation are usually held fairly strongly (assuming good perceptual conditions). Assumptions acquired through communication initially vary in strength depending on how much the audience trusts the communicator (on that type of information). Assumptions derived through inference acquire an initial degree of strength from the premises on which they are based. The idea that the strength of an assumption is not represented in absolute numerical terms via some subjective probability calculus, but is affected by its processing history, plays an important part in relevance-theoretic accounts of inference (Sperber and Wilson (1986, 1995, 75)). One consequence is that no absolute numerical judgments of strength are likely to be available to the individual, but only intuitive comparative judgments, which may not always be fine-grained enough to enable optional choices to be made.

According to Sperber and Wilson (1986, 1995), the initial strength of an assumption will vary as it is used in further inferential processes. For

example, the strength of my assumption that my computer is now working properly as a result of the new software I installed will increase as time passes without another crash. As further evidence is acquired, it will continue to be strengthened or weakened. As noted above, the strength of assumptions used in an inferential process will affect the strength of the conclusions drawn. The relevance of an input to cognitive processes is affected by the strength of the conclusions it yields, as I will now show.

I introduced the relevance-theoretic notion of cognitive effects in Chapter 2 (Section 4.2) and showed that, other things being equal, the greater the cognitive effects achieved by an input, the greater the relevance. The size of the cognitive effects achieved depends (a) on the number of alterations to existing assumptions and (b) on the size of the alterations. For example, an input may strengthen several existing assumptions: the more assumptions it strengthens, and the more it strengthens them, the greater the cognitive effects, and hence the greater the relevance. Thus, a strong assumption, one which the agent holds with a high degree of certainty, will yield greater cognitive effects than a weaker one, all other factors remaining equal. Here is an illustration. Let's say that I am planning a two-day weekend hike and need to check the weather forecast in order to know what kind of clothing to pack. Reading the weekend forecast in yesterday's newspaper provides me with relatively weak assumptions, as I know that the older a forecast, the less reliable it is. If I have no other source of information, I may use the outdated forecast, as it is certainly better than nothing: I can draw some tentative conclusions from it that may help me decide what to pack. However, because of the nature of this trip, I am willing to spend more time and effort obtaining an up-to-date report that will allow me to draw stronger conclusions, which will be more relevant in spite of the greater cost involved. If my weekend outdoor plans involved nothing more than a 10-minute walk to the movie theater, I might be satisfied with a less-than-certain forecast and would not bother to look for an update.

Just as factual assumptions (or beliefs) may be stronger or weaker, so may desires be stronger or weaker. Just as one can say, or think: “It is (definitely, probably, unlikely) that [the weather will be mild all weekend],” so one can say, or think: “It is (strongly, mildly, somewhat) desirable that [the weather be mild all weekend].” The same relationship between assumption strength, cognitive effects and relevance holds for both mentally-represented beliefs and mentally-represented desires (Sperber and Wilson, 1986, 1995, 74). That is, the assumption that a state of affairs is strongly desirable will yield greater positive cognitive effects and be of greater relevance to an individual, all other factors being equal than the assumption that it is mildly desirable. While desirability may vary in strength, I have also argued throughout this thesis that there is a qualitative difference between desires and intentions. I consider how the relation between desirability, intentions and relevance plays out in the context of persuasion in the next section.

As part of his planning theory, Bratman (1987, and more specifically 1999, “Practical reasoning and acceptance in a context”) shows how, in order to resolve means-end incoherence, or planning problems, one may have to “take things for granted” in a particular reasoning process (Bratman, 1999, 17). For instance, in preparing for my weekend hike, one of my intentions is to pack appropriate clothing and equipment. Because I will be carrying everything I take with me, I cannot afford to pack too much. The updated forecast I have found predicts a chance of rain for Sunday. While I recognize that the forecast is uncertain, and do not hold a strong belief that it will rain, in order to fulfill my intention to pack appropriately, I have to take it for granted that it may rain, and I pack some raingear. Since it is the middle of summer, I firmly believe that it will not snow and so, I do not consider taking snow boots. If I were simply going out for a 10-minute walk and it looked sunny enough, I might simply ignore

the weather forecast, take it for granted that it is not going to rain and go out without a raincoat.

This example illustrates Bratman's distinction between "taking for granted," or acceptance, which he sees as a context-dependent measure, resulting from the need to engage in practical reasoning (i.e., what I take for granted varies according to whether I am going on an all-weekend hike, or a 10-minute walk), and genuine, "firmly-held" (context-independent) beliefs. Acceptance, in Bratman's view, is an efficient substitute for belief, used only in specific contexts to provide input to a practical reasoning process. The borderline between acceptance and belief is fuzzy: it can overlap, include or differ completely from firmly-held beliefs.

Bratman's distinction between (context-dependent) acceptance and (context-independent) belief is important given the role of beliefs in practical reasoning. In what types of practical reasoning contexts a particular assumption can rationally be used and whether one can really adjust what one "takes for granted" *ad hoc*, as Bratman seems to suggest, is an interesting question in view of our account of persuasion. These adjustments, according to Bratman, involve either accepting (as seen in the hiking trip example), or "bracketing" an assumption in a given context. Bracketing involves ignoring a particular belief in a given context, also for the purpose of practical reasoning. For instance, while I do not believe that a certain candidate is the best qualified to be the next president, I bracket this belief after he has won the party's nomination, in order to support him against the other party's candidate.

The relevance-theoretic claim that assumptions may vary in strength sheds some light on this issue of adjusting assumptions to the practical reasoning context by characterizing acceptance and belief in terms of degrees of strength in a way that avoids the acceptance/belief dichotomy. More importantly, relevance theory accounts for the specific cognitive

mechanisms that account for initial assumption strength, how it is affected by inferential processes, and how it relates to the notion of relevance.

Bratman's account is thought-provoking because of his claim that the need to engage in practical reasoning may pressure an individual into acceptance (or bracketing). As he shows, there is a tension between the need to accept assumptions in order to solve outstanding planning problems efficiently and adaptively, and the need for a more elaborative rational search for evidence that might strengthen the required assumptions. As in other cases we have seen, the need to strike a balance between saving effort and achieving sound effects is critical to the process of persuasion.

Others have discussed the distinction between belief and acceptance along similar lines. In his introduction to a collection of essays on *"Believing and Accepting"*, Engel (2000) summarizes one such view as follows:

"A thinker can always, on this view, decide to accept the contents of his thoughts, or refuse to hold them as true, in order to reach a better rational state, or alternatively, because he opts, in some sense, for less than full rationality. In that sense, we can be responsible for our acceptances, although we are not responsible for our beliefs." (Engel, 2000, 11).

Critical here is the voluntariness of acceptance. For both Cohen (2001) and Engel (whose view Engel is summarizing), acceptance is intentional and specifically directed at practical reasoning, as it is for Bratman.

5.2. Practical reasoning and persuasion

I have argued in the first part of this chapter that the rational intention or desire of a communicator engaging in persuasive communication is to alter the audience's preferences, and ultimately intentions. Depending on the

nature of her pro-attitude (intention or desire) and the strength with which it is held, a persuasive communicator should be committed to persuading the audience, or encouraged to pursue this aim by a certain desire. She should then craft a stimulus designed to achieve the desired/intended effects on the audience in a way that is compatible with her own abilities, as laid down in the presumption of optimal relevance (Sperber and Wilson, 1995, 270), which I discussed in Chapter 1 and will repeat here:

Presumption of optimal relevance:

- (a) The ostensive stimulus is relevant enough for it to be worth the addressee's effort to process it.
- (b) The ostensive stimulus is the most relevant one compatible with the communicator's abilities and preferences

When the communicator's overt intention is merely to alter the audience's beliefs, the intended cognitive effects will be achieved by fulfilling the informative intention. When there is a full-fledged persuasive intention, however, the cognitive effects go beyond the "epistemic improvement" type (Sperber and Wilson, 1986, 1995, 266). Altering their audiences' knowledge or beliefs alone is not sufficient for persuasive communicators: these effects must result at least in intentions and preferably in actions. Sperber and Wilson discuss the possibility of broadening the notion of cognitive effects to deal with such cases, along lines suggested above (1995, 266):

"All the effects we are actually considering in this book are of this relatively well-defined epistemic kind. However we want to leave open the possibility of taking into account...other possible contributions to cognitive functioning, involving, for

instance, the reorganization of existing knowledge, or the elaboration of rational desires.”

In outlining my account of persuasion, I have assumed that an extension along these lines will be feasible. In persuasive communication, the pressure on the target to accept an assumption for practical reasoning purposes is exploited by the communicator, who offers a solution that might not have been considered, or opens up an unresolved (practical reasoning) problem that might not have been particularly salient. In this way, the target may be exposed to information whose strong intention-relevance, as foreseen by the communicator, may induce him to accept it as an assumption when it might have been considered too weak in a different context. In the weather forecast example in Section 5.1 above, although yesterday’s newspaper forecast may seem insufficient when packing for a long hike, I might be persuaded to accept it and act on it if I am told by another participant that the rest of the group is relying on it. The use of the conformity tactic (see Section 4.1 above) may be particularly appropriate in this case, as I may have an underlying intention to conform to the group in a situation of potential risk such as an adventurous outing. Here is a more detailed analysis of this.

- (20) Target’s intentions: to pack for a long hike (salient); to conform to the group for safety reasons (underlying, not as salient).

Target’s weak assumption: the weather may not be good.

Target’s problems: to find better information about the weather in order to know what to pack; to be safe by

conforming to the group.

Communicator's overall intention: to persuade the target to accept a given weather forecast.

Communicator's strategy: persuasion.

Communicator's tactic: conformity.

Communicator's informative intention: to inform the target that the group is relying on the weather forecast in packing their hiking gear.

Target's practical reasoning: The target believes that the group is relying on the weather forecast. By accepting and acting on the same information, the target will fulfill both his packing and his conforming intentions. The assumption that the weather may not be good is strengthened, and used as a premise in a practical reasoning process that results in packing the appropriate hiking gear.

I would now like to consider whether the persuasive intention/desire distinction (cf. Chapter 2, and Sections 2 and 4 of this chapter) is reflected in the way the audience processes persuasive stimuli and in their cognitive effects. Using the relevance-theoretic comprehension procedure, the audience identifies the range of implicatures that the communicator intends to convey, those she accepts may be used for practical reasoning purposes, and may result in a change of intentions (as intended or desired by the communicator). A communicator with a full-fledged persuasive intention

must aim for more than simply fulfilling her intention. She must intend for the audience to use some or all of the intended implications for practical reasoning purposes, with specific intentions as output. Thus, effects that are intended by the persuasive communicator go beyond the mere acceptance of the implicatures identifiable as part of her meaning: they require the audience to use some of these implicatures as inputs to a practical reasoning process with a specifically intended outcome.

At this point, someone might raise the following objection. I have just discussed the need for a distinction between believing an assumption and accepting it as input to a practical reasoning process. I have also discussed at length the existence of a “heuristic route” to persuasion. It might be suggested that there are cases in which a believed assumption contributes to a heuristic persuasion process without the audience deliberately “accepting” it, and that therefore the distinction between believing an assumption and accepting it as input to practical reasoning is blurry at best. I do not believe that such cases undermine my argument. While it is true that the audience may not deliberate the acceptance of every assumption used in practical reasoning (and no doubt will rarely do so), there is a set of norms, dispositions and habits that regulate the acceptance process in the absence of elaborative deliberation, and that are themselves entirely rational (Bratman, 1987). The application of these standards, which I shall discuss further in the next section, should be enough to warrant the distinction between believing an assumption and using it as a premise in a practical reasoning process.

5.3. Audience coping mechanisms and rationality

In developing his planning theory, Bratman (1987) discusses at some length the mechanisms and underlying dispositions that ensure the rationality of our decision about whether to adopt a new intention or reconsider an existing intention. What are the mechanisms and dispositions

that ensure the rationality of the decisions we make when faced with an externally proposed solution to an unresolved planning problem? And, given the complexity of the factors involved, how do we make these decisions in an efficient and adaptive way?

Bratman categorizes and systematizes the range of deliberative processes and dispositions that might encourage or inhibit acceptance, intention adoption or reconsideration. He first distinguishes between deliberative and non-deliberative intentions. A deliberative intention is adopted at a given moment as the result of a deliberation. Non-deliberative intentions are adopted at a given moment as a result of a deliberation that took place in the past. A third category, policy-based intentions, can be adopted without any deliberation, in accordance with a previously adopted personal policy. For instance, having a personal policy of always fastening my seatbelt when entering a car, I do not need to deliberate this intention each time I adopt it.

The fact that an intention may be adopted not as an immediate result of deliberation, but as a result of a previous deliberation, a longstanding policy, or (in the case of a “derivative” intention) as a step towards the fulfillment of a previously adopted intention, is important in Bratman’s framework. Indeed, in his view, plans extend “the influence of deliberation over time, thereby helping us avoid becoming time-slice agents,” (Bratman, 1987, 107). This “temporal extension” of plans is a key feature of both their rationality and their role in coordinating an individual’s own actions with each other, and with those of others. So, when Bratman uses the term “deliberation” in this context, he probably does not mean to claim that intentions can only be adopted in a deliberative, or elaborative way, but rather that some form of previous deliberation, policy, or higher-order intention might have resulted in this intention being adopted. In my view, Bratman’s failure to discuss the adoption of intentions for heuristic reasons comes not so much from any reluctance to incorporate the notion into his

framework, but from his focus on a reflective agent rather than an interactive one. While he does discuss the benefits of planning for interpersonal coordination, he does not discuss communication, or its effects on intention adoption. Because the prime candidates for heuristic intention adoption come from utterances and other communicative stimuli, the possibility of non-elaborative, heuristic intention adoption is not considered. So Bratman's failure to examine intention adoption in interactive contexts undermines neither his theory's applicability to such contexts, nor his commitment to a bounded rationality framework.

Clearly, intentions are often formed long in advance of the performance of the action they bring about. While they have an inherent inertia, in Bratman's terms, they do at times undergo reconsideration. Whether and when it is rational to reconsider one's intentions, for what reasons and in what ways, can also become a subject of higher-order deliberation. What controls these mechanisms of deliberation and reconsideration, at different levels, are dispositions specific to each individual – habits and propensities which themselves may be more or less rational. Bratman is particularly concerned with the efficiency of these processes and dispositions. Deliberation and reconsideration, at any level in the intention structure, can be performed either elaboratively or heuristically. Which form will be used on a given occasion depends on the organization of one's habits, dispositions and norms – themselves efficiently programmed to come into play when needed.

The notion of intention-relevance, introduced in Chapter 2, is important here. I characterized intention-relevance as a property of an input to cognitive processes that varies positively with the benefits derived from accepting it for practical reasoning purposes (e.g., the resolution of one's planning problems, means-end coherence and consistency), and negatively with the processing costs incurred. Whether or not it triggers a deliberative process will depend on how intention-relevant it is. According to

Bratman's framework, whether or not the agent engages in a deliberative process, the rationality of his intention will depend on his adherence to the rationality-preserving habits, norms and dispositions described above, including means-end coherence, consistency with previously-adopted desires and beliefs, and commitment.

Friestad and Wright (1994) argue that both the persuasive communicator and the target have become competent in the use of persuasion tactics through social interaction and the direct experience of persuasive situations. For the target, as discussed in Chapter 3, this competence is used to cope with persuasive stimuli to his own advantage. In other words, the target uses his knowledge of persuasive tactics to either accept or reject the message conveyed by the stimulus, and/or to either enable or disable its effect on his intentions and ultimately his actions. Again, not surprisingly, these coping mechanisms can take the form of heuristic strategies or a more systematic elaborative process. These strategies can intervene either at the acceptance stage or further along in the practical reasoning process. An individual may develop efficient strategies that detect and reject conclusions from all instances of certain types of unacceptable persuasion stimuli, e.g., certain types of advertising, political propaganda or "spin" etc, or he may "configure" certain variables to trigger systematic processing of stimuli that register a given value on these variables. For instance, while one may be quite content to watch, and possibly accept some degree of persuasion from a series of advertisements while sitting in a movie theater, one's sensitivity to vulgarity may trigger complete rejection of a particular ad whose level of vulgarity is sufficiently high.

These coping mechanisms, along with the ability to set their sensitivity parameters, are one form of rationality at work in the process of persuasion. While it is sometimes rational to allow others to influence one's intentions and actions, it is only rational if one can set the parameters in such a way as to limit such influence in certain types of contexts. From the persuader's

point of view, producing a persuasive stimulus that manages to elude the target's coping mechanisms, or (for the more cooperative communicator) to work within their defined limits, is key to successful persuasive communication.

6. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have illustrated the dynamics that underlie persuasion processes, by discussing the different forces that motivate a communicator to try to persuade, and a target audience to accept the communicator's influence into his own practical reasoning processes. Underlying these processes is each player's powerful arsenal of rationality checks and balances. The ability of a communicator to form intentions that reach beyond her own actions to target another individual's planning structure exists only because of the cognitive and practical benefits this intervention may bring to the audience. This *quid pro quo* is limited by the constraints on rationality imposed by both players. In a practical sense, each player must seek to strike an optimal balance between maximizing relevance for himself while offering sufficient relevance to the other to ensure the desired effects. In the next chapter, I will show how this dynamic system is under constant pressure to adapt to a changing environment.

CHAPTER FIVE

ADAPTIVE PERSUASION

1. Introduction

Having developed a framework that offers a general perspective on persuasive communication, and in particular on its relations to communication, social intelligence and practical reasoning, I move on to an aspect of persuasion which I have alluded to in previous chapters, but which remains to be clarified and further developed: the adaptive aspect of persuasive communication. Human communication creates a tension between the goals of the communicator and those of the audience. As a result of this tension, communicators and audiences alike have developed increasingly sophisticated skills in order to fulfill their intentions both towards and despite each other. It has been suggested (Sperber, e.g. 2000 a) that these adaptive skills have evolved into cognitive modules and driven the evolution of communication. In this chapter, I will consider how persuasive communication, in particular, takes advantage of the functions of communication, adapts to an evolving communicative environment, and plays an important role in the evolution of communication. I will argue that persuasive communicators – marketers, advertisers and anyone with a persuasive intention – often succeed in fulfilling this intention by exploiting the mechanisms by which information spreads among a population. I will try to show that a better understanding of these “social learning” mechanisms can make an interesting contribution to the study of persuasive communication.

2. The two functions of communication

In the words of Sperber (2001, 9), the “epistemic norms implicit in the process of communication are to a limited but interesting extent at odds with the very function of communication.” The function of communication is two-fold: to the audience, it is a means of acquiring relevant information; to the communicator, it is a means of affecting the beliefs and other attitudes of the audience. I will start by illustrating how these goals may come into conflict.

To the audience, communication is often a more efficient means than direct observation or perception (and in many cases, the only means) of obtaining relevant information. This information-gathering function of communication seems to be reflected in the fact that young children generally pay little attention to the source of new information they acquire. Harris (2002) argues that young children automatically accept communicated information that is compatible with what they know and is not overtly marked as a case of pretense. He reports several studies suggesting that children do not keep track of whether they acquired information first-hand, via direct perception, or second-hand, via communication. Given the possibility of deceptive communication, this might be seen as potentially detrimental and maladaptive, but may also indicate that because both types of sources are, at least initially, equally trustworthy, the nature of the source is irrelevant to young children. Clearly, information obtained from a communicator is only beneficial to an audience if it is true, and can therefore achieve relevance by warranting the derivation of positive cognitive effects. This is the “epistemic norm” of communication, discussed by Sperber (2001, 9); it is linked directly to the information-gathering function of communication: that it is expected to yield true (and relevant) information.

Whether all communicated information is reliable in this way, however, is brought into question by the fact that the belief-production function of communication, which is of benefit to communicators, does not depend on the information communicated actually being true, but merely on its producing effects that benefit the communicator. The best (though not the only) way of changing the audience's behavior to the benefit of the communicator is generally to convince the audience that the presented information is true. So the communicator's goal in formulating her utterance is to make her message *seem* plausible to the audience (whether or not it is actually true).

Thus, while the communicator chooses the stimulus that will best fulfill her intention to produce the desired effects on the audience, the audience aims to retrieve true (and relevant) information in order to fulfill its own goal of learning more about the world without putting itself at risk of storing false beliefs, or being manipulated to act in a way not beneficial to itself. To the communicator, conveying false but plausible-seeming information may, at times, be the best way to fulfill her intentions, while to the audience, the potential for misinformation or manipulation thus introduced creates the need for close examination of the information received and the intentions displayed. In a given communicative exchange, the audience has no choice but to put up with the uncertainty resulting from the tension between the two functions of communication. If it trusts the communicator, it runs the risk of being misinformed or manipulated; if it doesn't trust the communicator, it runs the risk of missing out on relevant information.

One of the areas in which we can expect to find communication used to its full potential by communicators and audiences alike is in the teaching and learning of cultural mechanisms, often referred to as cultural transmission or social learning. I will begin by examining some of the social learning mechanisms that have been proposed in the anthropological

and evolutionary literature, and considering how they account both for the way cultures spread and for the way individuals accept or reject cultural information.

3. Social learning: cognition and culture

Although much communicated information relates to the immediate situation of the interlocutors, at least some of it (we might call it cultural information) has a wider relevance, over a longer period, to members of a broader group. Not only do audiences often seek out such information, but there is evidence to suggest that it has properties which make it attractive and relevant enough to be repeatedly communicated and remembered (Sperber, 1996). What are the mechanisms involved in acquiring cultural information? Who should audiences trust when they lack first-hand evidence of their own?

While there are many theories of how cultural information is transmitted from one generation to the next, our understanding of the subject has benefited greatly from research in evolutionary and developmental psychology, as well as in cognitive and evolutionary anthropology. One major obstacle to a better understanding of social learning was removed by the collapse of the view of the mind as a “blank slate” with virtually no innate structure, and the related Standard Social Science Model, which treats culture as an entity which is external to the mind. The blank slate model is clearly incompatible with most aspects of current cognitive psychology. The Standard Social Science Model is rejected more specifically by researchers working across disciplinary boundaries, who bring together the principles of anthropology, evolutionary biology and cognitive psychology in developing different theories of how culture is transmitted (Tooby and Cosmides, 1992; Boyd and Richerson, 1996;

Sperber, 1996; Tomasello, 1999; Aunger, 2002; and, for a comprehensive review, Laland and Brown, 2002).

Despite their substantial differences, these theories agree that the mind, far from being unstructured, is innately highly structured. Accordingly, at least some aspects of social learning are seen as facilitated by the architecture of the mind. A number of hypotheses have been proposed to account for the universality of these cultural abilities and the mechanisms for acquiring cultural information, while allowing on the one hand for cultural diversity, cultural change over “historical” time, cultural evolution over much longer time spans, and, on the other hand, for the relative stability of cultures over time. For instance, while rites of passage for adolescents vary greatly from one culture to another, most cultures seem to develop some form of ritualized transition from childhood to adulthood, marking the biological changes of puberty. In many Jewish communities of Western Europe and North America, the traditional bar mitzvah ceremony for boys has been adapted in the latter part of the 20th century to include a similar ceremony for girls. Further adaptation in the last five years suggests that the practice may be spreading to non-Jewish communities (where it is known as “faux bar mitzvah”¹) as an opportunity to celebrate a child’s thirteenth birthday with the same fanfare as has become customary in many Jewish communities. In other words, having evolved over time from a biological milestone to a cultural rite, the custom remains stable (both across cultures and within a specific culture) in spite of its adaptation in a very short historical time span to the pressures of consumer culture.

¹ “Party politics,” *The Times*(London), 17 May 2004,
<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,2682-1110200,00.html>

3.1. The epidemiology of representations

The central theme of Sperber's theory of culture (Sperber, 1996) is borrowed from epidemiology. It claims that culture is "catching", and spreads when ideas (or mental representations) are propagated throughout a population. Clearly, representations, whether mental or public, do not propagate randomly; rather, they spread among specific groups of individuals who come into contact with each other. According to Sperber, mental representations are disseminated through human communication via causal chains in which utterances expressing similar ideas are repeatedly produced and understood, passing on in this way from one person or group to the next. The appropriate relation between the representations involved is one of resemblance in content rather than of identity of content. The communicator starts with a certain set of thoughts, which she translates into an utterance. The mental representation formed by the audience as a result of the interpretation process is similar in content to the communicator's original thought, but it is the audience's own interpretation of what they have understood. There are at least two points at which differences in content may be introduced, one when the communicator translates her thought into an utterance, and the other when the audience interprets the utterance and constructs a hypothesis about the speaker's meaning. Thus, a culture is created and consolidated over time by a mass of microscopic communicative events, and the question is: what are the mechanisms which ensure that some representations survive and propagate, and others die out? These mechanisms are likely to be the key not only to the spread of cultures, but also to the working of persuasive communication both at the individual and the societal level (as in advertising and marketing).

3.2. The massive modularity hypothesis

An important element of Sperber's epidemiological framework is the hypothesis that the mind has a massively modular architecture. According

to this hypothesis, the mind consists of a huge number of domain-specific mechanisms or modules. A mechanism is domain-specific, in Sperber's sense, if it accepts a restricted set of representations as inputs, and performs a restricted set of procedures on these inputs. The massive modularity hypothesis contrasts with the widely-accepted Fodorian view (Fodor, 1983, 2001) that higher cognitive processes are carried out by a domain-general, non-modular, central conceptual system, and that modularity is restricted to a few input systems (essentially, the senses plus language).

While defending the massive modularity hypothesis is not part of my aim in this thesis, I will mention some of the arguments used by Sperber (1994 b, 2002, forthcoming b), as they help clarify the hypothesis itself and bring out some of its implications for relevance theory, on the one hand, and the epidemiology of representations, on the other.

One of Sperber's arguments has to do with the evolution of cognition. Fodor and Sperber agree that modular input systems originally provided input to modularized computational systems. According to Fodor, the modular computational systems became demodularized over time, the result being the present-day domain-general central processing system which Fodor defends. Sperber argues that such a development would not have been adaptive:

“to the extent that evolution goes toward improving a species' biological endowments, then we should generally expect improvements in the manner in which existing modules perform their task, emergence of new modules to handle other problems, but not demodularization.” (Sperber, 1994 b, 45).

Demodularization, in Sperber's view, is implausible: it would have resulted in a loss of speed and automaticity rather than a less constrained system, as Fodor suggests:

“cognitive evolution would....have been in the direction of gradually freeing certain sorts of problem-solving systems from the constraints under which input analyzers labor.” (Fodor, 1983) (quoted in Sperber, 1994 b, 45).

According to Sperber, evolutionary change should tend towards greater specialization and modularization rather than less. The development of a specialized mental mechanism or module reflects an “opportunistic,” “piecemeal” response of the mind to challenges presented by the environment (Sperber, forthcoming b). Since evolution is a gradual process, one should expect it to have resulted in the development of a large number of small and specialized solutions rather than one massive change. As Sperber notes, the evolutionary tendency towards increasing modularity is not limited to cognition: it is uncontroversially accepted in human biology for many organs and other systems such as the liver, muscles, etc.

Some of the adaptive, specialized mechanisms resulting from evolutionary pressures are pre-wired, and do not require any learning (e.g., the inborn ability to avoid vertical drops found in many mammals (Sperber, forthcoming b)). Others are innate learning mechanisms (e.g. language) that allow children to acquire both new information and new procedures on exposure to appropriate triggers, still others may have fully pre-wired procedures but require some learning of new information to construct an appropriate data-base (e.g., the ability to recognize faces (ibid.)). All three types of modules are pre-wired to some extent, and differ in the amount of learning required to activate them fully: no learning may be necessary (vertical drop avoidance), some learning of the appropriate database may be necessary (face-recognition), or learning of both the procedures and the database using a pre-wired template may be required (language). The important question, therefore, is how much is accounted for by learning and

how much by an innate modular structure? We will see, in Sections 3.4 and 3.5 below, that this is the subject of a great deal of ongoing research and debate.

Modules that have been proposed in the literature include the so-called “theory of mind” and other “folk” or “naïve” theories that enable causal reasoning or the inferential attribution of mental states (cf. attribution theory, Chapter 3, Section 2). Such modules are seen as playing an important role in the development of the child’s cognitive abilities. Other modular mechanisms discussed earlier in this thesis include the “fast and frugal” heuristics proposed by Gigerenzer et al. (cf. Chapter 4, Section 3; Gigerenzer, 1997), which provide specialized solutions to bounded rationality problems, and the relevance-theoretic comprehension procedure (Chapter 1). As noted above, recent work in relevance theory suggests that comprehension is a module in its own right rather than an application of more general mind-reading abilities (Sperber and Wilson, 2002; Wilson, 2003). From the perspective of the massive modularity hypothesis, communication is a domain in which a wide range of specialized mental mechanisms and procedures compete for resources.

3.3. Domain specificity and relevance

A module is activated by any input which meets its input conditions: that is, any input with properties which identify it as belonging to the module’s domain. Sperber (1996) draws an important distinction between a module’s proper domain and its actual domain. The proper domain of a module consists of those inputs which it is the module’s function to process. In intuitive terms, the module *evolved* to process inputs of this type, and would not exist if they did not exist. However, not all the representations that satisfy the module’s input conditions belong to the module’s proper domain. Some inputs may “accidentally” satisfy the input conditions for a module, although it evolved to process inputs of a rather

different type. These inputs belong to what Sperber (1996) calls the module's actual domain.

Many cultural artifacts and representations fall into the actual domain of a cognitive module by design rather than by accident, and therefore trigger its operation, even though they do not fall into its proper domain. These inputs constitute what Sperber calls the "cultural domain" of a module. Examples include face masks (e.g. Sperber and Hirschfeld, 2004) which meet the input conditions of the face recognition module and therefore automatically activate it, even though it evolved to process real faces, not masks. Another example is music, which Sperber (1996) speculates may have started as a type of stimulus that happened to meet the input conditions of an early voice detection module, and evolved into a much wider cultural domain.

If the mind is massively modular, a given input may satisfy the input conditions of several modules at once. This raises the question of how an input comes to be processed by the module that will yield the most cognitive effects, and how mental resources are allocated among the many modules which are activated by an input at a given time. This is largely a cost-benefit question, in which the cost is the processing effort required and the benefits positive cognitive effects. The cognitive principle of relevance, which claims that "human cognition tends to be geared to the maximization of relevance." (Wilson and Sperber, 2002, 254) should therefore provide an answer. Within the relevance-theoretic framework, the mind is seen as having developed heuristics for the optimally efficient allocation of resources so as to maximize relevance. As Sperber (forthcoming b) puts it:

"(the pressure to) optimize the allocation of energy to modules... (has) result(ed) in the evolution of a variety of traits contributing to an optimal allocation... (These) include...the use of simple and approximate indicators of the ongoing and

expected expenditure of energy, and of the ongoing and expected cognitive impact of specific procedures.”

In other words, any input meeting a module’s input conditions is assigned an “initial level of activation”, which will be raised or lowered as processing continues. This adaptive feature of modules enables them to allocate resources efficiently depending on the expected relevance of an input. Ostensive-inferential communication is a case in point: every ostensive stimulus creates an expectation of relevance, which triggers the working of the comprehension module, an adaptive feature that serves both the communicator’s and the audience’s interests.

Sperber suggests that, as with music and masks, the possibility of mismatches between a module’s proper and actual domains may be exploited by communicators for their own benefit. As a result, the communicator can take advantage, on the one hand, of the inherent cognitive salience of inputs that meet a module’s input conditions, and on the other hand, of the fact that such inputs are processed by modular mechanisms with relatively little mental effort, and are therefore potentially more relevant on the processing-effort side. Cultural artifacts that are deliberately crafted to fit a module’s input conditions may create particular expectations of relevance, because, like all artifacts, they appear to be intended for some purpose, which the audience may devote some effort to recognizing. This type of manipulative strategy exploits the basic architecture of the mind, taking a free ride on mental mechanisms that evolved to meet some quite different challenge. It is very similar to persuasive tactics, which I will discuss in Section 4 of this chapter, in which the persuasive communicator takes advantage of adaptive mechanisms or abilities in formulating a persuasive stimulus, hoping that it will enter the practical reasoning process and therefore modify behavior.

Because it allows for small changes at each step in the multitude of communication episodes making up a cultural causal chain, Sperber's epidemiological approach can accommodate the diversity of cultures and "changes in historical time" (e.g. Sperber, 1996). It can also account for the overall stability of culture by the appeal to universals of cognitive architecture, such as massive modularity and the relevance-oriented nature of cognition and communication (Sperber and Wilson, 1986, 1995; Sperber and Hirschfeld, 2004). The general claim is that cultural information will be attended to because it is apparently relevant, and it is apparently relevant because it automatically triggers existing modules. What still remains to be explained is why some of this potentially relevant information is accepted as true, while other parts are rejected.

3.4. Transmission biases

Boyd and Richerson's work on cultural evolution (e.g. 1985, 1996, 2005 forthcoming) also has its roots in anthropology, but is superficially very different from Sperber's. While acknowledging its speculative nature, Boyd and Richerson favor a view of the mind as equipped with domain-general learning systems or devices (e.g., Boyd and Richerson, 2005, 69-72) made up of both individual and social learning mechanisms. Individual learning is based on first-hand experience and involves trial and error, but it can lead to innovative solutions when it is successful. Social learning is the "acquisition of behavior by observation or teaching from other conspecifics" (Boyd and Richerson, 2005, 20), and "is a device for multiplying the power of individual learning" (ibid, 70). Under the right conditions, it is more efficient and adaptive than individual learning and/or specialized pre-wired learning mechanisms, because it takes advantage of, and helps to disseminate, the vast stocks of information accumulated over generations and available to individuals in a population. In other words, social learning enables the transmission of culture and ensures cultural

stability. There are trade-offs between social and individual learning. When the price that has to be paid for individual learning by trial and error is too high (e.g., the risk of error too great), individuals resort to social learning. On the other hand, social learning also carries costs, according to Boyd and Richerson (e.g., forthcoming a, 3). Relying on others' experience carries the risk of accepting maladaptive beliefs, as discussed in Section 2 above, as it requires a certain degree of trust (or credulity). In addition, social learning may fail to deliver an appropriate solution to a given problem, in which case individuals need to resort to trial-and-error learning (which can result, as mentioned, in greater innovation). A combination of the two types of learning is adaptive, as the innovations generated by trial-and-error learning can be transmitted from one generation to the next, incorporating small improvements along the way, via social learning mechanisms. Boyd and Richerson suggest, however, that complex cultural adaptations tend to result from the inherent relative stability of social learning rather than from innovations resulting from individual learning. At the population level, the two types of learning mechanisms work together to account for both the stability and the accumulation over generations of innovative behaviors.

The individual and social learning devices hypothesized by Boyd and Richerson differ in their domain of application from the learning mechanisms or "module templates" discussed by Sperber (1996 and forthcoming). Whereas Sperber's view, as we saw in Section 3.2 above, is that the learning mechanisms are domain-specific, Boyd and Richerson treat them as domain-general. The absence of domain specificity in Boyd and Richerson's account of mental architecture is compensated by the biases that are built into social learning. These "transmission biases", or efficient learning strategies, such as the disposition to learn from experts or prestigious individuals (the "prestige" bias) or to conform to the majority

(the “conformism” bias) apply across all domains, but favor the learning of adaptive solutions. I will discuss them in much greater detail shortly.

What exactly are the social learning mechanisms that Boyd and Richerson have in mind? In their work on the conformism bias, Henrich and Boyd (1998) characterize social learning as “observational learning”² while in their work on prestige, Henrich and Gil-White (2001) refer it as “infocopying”.³ Understanding the exact nature of these social learning mechanisms is important, as it has implications for the issue of whether social learning relies on inference (as in Sperber’s epidemiological/relevance-theoretic perspective) rather than replication (as argued by many memeticists, as we will see in the next section). In Sperber’s view, it is the inferential nature of transmission that accounts for the inherent variation that drives the adaptive process, according to. The important question to answer in determining which type of transmission/learning is taking place is whether recognition of the model’s⁴ intention is involved in the learning process. If intentions have to be recognized, inference rather than simple imitation is taking place.

Henrich and Gil-White (2001) characterize infocopying as “involv(ing) the transmission of both goals and motor patterns” (ibid, 174). While this does not amount to a fully inferential characterization, the reference to recognition of goals does suggest that some form of inferential processing plays a part in infocopying. In their discussion of the role of observational learning in social learning, Boyd and Richerson (1996) also suggest that it

² Observational learning “occurs when younger animals observe the behavior of older animals and learn how to perform a novel behavior by watching them,” Boyd and Richerson (2000).

³ “particular forms of *direct* social learning, which we collectively term *infocopying*. This category encompasses all forms of acquiring information directly from another, and includes, but is not limited to, “true imitation” (acquiring the details of motor patterns via direct observation...) and “goal emulation” (inferring behavioral goals via direct observation ...)” Henrich and Gil-White (2001, 172).

is a more complex form of transmission than imitation. They refer to Tomasello's work (e.g., Tomasello et al., 1993, Tomasello, 1999) in which he discusses human social learning as clearly drawing on theory of mind competence (i.e. the attribution of mental states in order to predict and explain behavior).

While there is no doubt that Boyd, Richerson and their colleagues see some understanding of intentionality as necessary to social learning, what is less evident in their accounts is how much intention recognition their notions of imitation, observational learning and/or infocopying actually involve. As discussed in Chapter 2, Section 4.1, some developmental psychologists (e.g., Astington, 2001, Schult, 2000) have criticized the fact that many accounts of intention detection in infants simply look for a child's ability to match a desire to an outcome, while ignoring the issue of whether the child is able to fully metarepresent an intention and understand its causal self-referentiality. That discussion highlighted how much variation exists between different accounts of intention recognition. In the case of social learning, the question seems to be whether learners have to infer the model's intentions in order to perform the transmitted behavior. In a recent paper, Henrich, Boyd and Richerson (forthcoming, 4) discuss inferential processes as one of the "two key components of psychology...of most direct relevance to understanding cultural evolution," and state:

"The idea here is to open the black box of imitation... How do individuals decompose a continuous stream of behavior into steps (do minds do this)? How do individuals infer the goals of the individuals they attempt to imitate? How do the building blocks of inference (e.g., theory of mind, naïve physics, folk

⁴ "model" is often used in the context of social learning to refer to the individual from whom the "learner" learns.

biology, etc.), if they exist, shape the inferences individuals draw from observing these selected cultural models?...”

Leaving this debate aside for a short while, we’ll examine transmission biases, the other “key component of psychology” proposed by Boyd, Richerson and their colleagues. As mentioned above, Boyd, Richerson et al. have extensively studied the role of two such biases, “prestige” and “conformism”, in social learning, and modeled their effects on cultural evolution. I will consider one of their arguments with a view to incorporating this notion of transmission biases into the account of persuasion I have been developing in this thesis. More specifically, I will argue in Section 4.3 below that transmission biases are the basis for the persuasive strategies discussed in Chapter 3, which have been found to be used effectively by professional persuaders (Cialdini (1993, 2001)).

According to Henrich and Gil-White (2001), the role of prestige in social transmission evolved from two different adaptive behaviors, skill-ranking and deference, coupled with the human ability to infocopy. Skill-ranking is the ability to identify individuals who perform well at certain tasks, and rank them according to their degree of skill. Deference is a simpler mechanism that evolved from scrounging behavior, in which individuals stay close to those with greater foraging success, in order to benefit from their “food finds.”

Given the ability to infocopy, observers are able to “learn” the behavior of those who perform best, taking them as models. Henrich and Gil-White argue that infocopying is necessary for skill-ranking to be of any use, as the learner must be able not just to observe the model’s successful behavior, but also to associate it with a particular goal (Henrich and Gil-White, 2001, 174). In fact, it might be argued that full-fledged intention recognition must be involved even in the simple skill-ranking competence. How would

a learner attribute a successful behavior to the model and endeavor to learn it unless he was able to infer the model's intentions?

As highly-skilled individuals were identified and shown deference, the two behaviors co-evolved to result in the prestige-conferring bias which is now observed. Henrich and Gil-White (ibid.) characterize prestige as a status that is "conferred" on some individuals (models) by others (in this case, learners, whose goal is to identify and learn beneficial behaviors efficiently, without the cost of discovering the benefits of these behaviors from their own experience).

Prestige is "conferred" by a learner on a model, based on a number of cues: displays of deference by other learners, competence in culturally-valued domains, and overall state of health. Translated into modern terms, it is easy to see how these cues might be triggered by sports and entertainment personalities, politicians, successful entrepreneurs and financiers and other categories of prestigious "role models" in marketing campaigns. While "state of health" seems, at first glance, outdated, it is actually not so, judging by the intense coverage surrounding the injuries and illnesses of football or tennis stars. Also, if "state of health" is understood in a financial or legal sense, it is a clear mark of prestige for business leaders, judging from the quick loss of prestige experienced by leaders going through financial difficulties, or stars with legal difficulties. On the other hand, such difficulties may, if "spun" properly, elicit sympathy, as in the case of "lifestyle guru," Martha Stewart, whose jail term for insider-trading only enhanced her business success⁵.

An important point made by Henrich and Gil-White is that prestige is conferred on a model (i.e. a person or a group), rather than on the type of

⁵ "What are her prospects for making more money? Pretty good if early indications are anything to go by. She could even end up profiting from her experience," see "What's next for Martha Stewart?" BBC News Website, 4 March 2005, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/business/4317651.stm>

behavior that may have led to the model's success, because of the high cost of "figuring out which combinations of ideas, beliefs, and behaviors" are relevant (ibid, 184). As a result, once a model has acquired prestige, infocopying from that model takes place fairly indiscriminately, and can result in maladaptive traits "hitchhiking along with adaptive ones" (ibid, 176). That a model's prestige can result in individuals learning a behavior that is unrelated to the source of the model's success is frequently illustrated. For instance, young boys who admire a football star might learn from him the value of good physical fitness (the source of his success), but also the less-beneficial behavior of swearing at referees or other officials. The further point that maladaptive traits can get a free ride is very similar to Sperber's point (forthcoming b), discussed in Section 3.3 above, that a manipulative communicator may craft a stimulus mimicking the inputs to a module's proper domain. I will discuss the obvious relation between these strategies and persuasion later in this chapter and in Chapter 6.

Henrich and Gil-White also argue that prestigious models who become arrogant or "show off" their prestige can lose some of it, especially in environments where models are competing for followers. In their view, this explains self-deprecating behavior by celebrities. This point is debatable, to my mind, as self-deprecating behavior seems to be less prevalent among prestigious models than outrageous and arrogant behavior. The most effective balance is clearly difficult to strike.

More generally, the transmission biases invoked by Boyd, Richerson and their colleagues are sophisticated social learning heuristics that help an individual efficiently identify models from whom to learn. Rather than engaging in inefficient trial and error (individual learning), individuals rely on their observations of their peers, who either experience success as individuals (prestige), or engage in the same behavior as many others (conformism). These individuals, or groups, are then used as models from which to learn both the successful behaviors and other behaviors whose

success has not necessarily been assessed. Because observers do not limit themselves to learning behaviors shown to have been successful, they incur the risk of learning maladaptive behavior (Boyd and Richerson, forthcoming a).

Apart from the possible difference, which I have discussed in this section, in how they view the contribution of inference to learning, there is one other important difference between Sperber's views, and those of Boyd, Richerson and their colleagues. This is connected with the issue of modularity. Both Sperber, on the one hand, and Boyd and Richerson, on the other, recognize the existence of specific innate tendencies that guide the social learning process. Sperber attributes these tendencies to specialized modules operating on their proper or actual domain, guided by the overall search for relevance, while Boyd and Richerson attribute them to specific heuristic processes. In other words, for Boyd and Richerson, transmission biases favor particular sources of information or learning rather than the content of the transmitted information (they are "non-content" biases, (Gil-White, 2004, 17-18⁶; Richerson and Boyd, 2005, 120⁷)), whereas modules, for instance face-recognition or folk sociology, guide audiences towards specific types of content (hence, "content biases" (ibid.)), regardless of the source.

On the other hand, Boyd and Richerson's views may actually be more compatible with Sperber's epidemiology and massive modularity framework than first appears. While there are some real questions, as mentioned earlier in this section, about how much intention recognition their view of social learning involves, Boyd and Richerson (e.g., 1996) recognize that the capacity for social learning from selected individuals or

⁶ "These two biases (conformity and prestige) care nothing about content: conformity bias cares about relative frequency, and prestige bias about source. As far as these biases are concerned, the memes could be about anything at all." Gil-White, 2004, 18.

groups would have been too costly to evolve on its own. With Tomasello et al. (1993), they suggest that social learning has evolved as a by-product of theory of mind and rests on the ability to read intentions. Unless the learner is able to understand the intention that lies behind the action performed by the model, they argue, social learning does not enable improvements or result in cumulative cultural transmission. If the learning mechanisms suggested by Boyd and Richerson are indeed linked to mind-reading, they should, arguably, be guided by the search for relevance, and be modular for that reason. In that sense, Boyd and Richerson's notion of social learning may actually be compatible with modularity-based perspectives such as Sperber's. This view is expressed by Sperber and Hirschfeld (2004, 40), who suggest that their perspective and Boyd and Richerson's are not necessarily mutually exclusive, but rather compatible and, possibly, complementary.

Another point on which the modularity perspective is probably closer to Boyd and Richerson's than may appear has to do with the actual nature and source of the transmission biases. It seems that the natural dispositions to conform, either to a majority or to authority or expertise, could ultimately be accounted for as a by-product of the search for relevance, rather than being seen as driven by distinct tendencies. In fact, while Boyd and Richerson treat the learning mechanisms as general and the transmission biases as more specific, Sperber's perspective owes its generality to the fact that the search for relevance is a general property of cognitive processes, and its specificity to the modular nature of cognitive processes (forthcoming b). Keeping in mind that culture plays an important role in Sperber's account of the way modules have evolved, in effect capturing the

⁷ “what we call content bias – careful comparison shopping among existing ideas – is likely to involve a costly research for good data ...” (Richerson and Boyd, 2005, 120)

population-level cumulative cultural evolution, the differences between the two perspectives are less dramatic than may initially appear.

3.5. The “third road”

I’ve discussed two perspectives on cultural evolution, both applying Darwinian principles to culture. Aunger (2002 and forthcoming a) proposes a “third road” in the Darwinian tradition, an innovative approach to the memetic framework.

The notion of “meme,” coined by Dawkins (1976), is intended to parallel that of “gene” in biology. It denotes elements of culture, “residing in the brain,” such as catch-phrases and ideas, that are “cultural replicators” in that they cause their own reproduction and replicate from one individual to another via imitation. Rather than being governed by the considerations of survival or welfare of the individual carrier, memes are “selfish,” so that the Darwinian process of selection is directed towards ensuring survival of the memes themselves, rather than the individual who carries them.

According to Sperber (2000 b, 164), because there is little genuine replication of representations, cultural elements that actually possess the two characteristics of memes (self-reproduction and faithful replication) are scarce (chain letters might constitute an example, he suggests). Generally, when a representation is transmitted, an inferential process takes place in both the communicator (or model) and the audience (or learner). As argued in 3.4 above, these inferential processes generally transform the representation in some way that is not consistent with faithful replication. Even in the case of a chain letter, the person copying the letter may introduce some distortion.

Perhaps an example of genuine replication might be the downloading of “pdf” files of published papers or pre-prints from academic websites, or of music from sites such as i-tunes or Netscape? Because these files can usually be saved to the user’s own computer, one might argue that they

cause their own replication. Do they qualify as true replicators? In one way, they might be good candidates, as an exact copy can be had with a simple click on a hyperlink. However, they do not seem to satisfy either of the two characteristics of memes listed above (self-reproduction and faithful replication). First, the files cannot be said to self-replicate as, unlike malicious computer viruses, they do require a human agent intentionally clicking on the link in order to be downloaded. Second, although there is no question that the digital copy of the files is perfectly faithful to the original (a “reproduction” in Sperber’s terms (2000 b, 164)), the cultural transmission event involves less-than-faithful “re-production” (ibid.). Let me explain. Because the files do not self-replicate and require human agency to be replicated digitally, we cannot limit our analysis of the transmission event to digital replication. Therefore, we must consider the event as one in which the intentions of the participating human agents (the individual posting the pdf document, and the one downloading it) are involved. Each of these two individuals has a set of intentions and, therefore, each interprets the file within this context of intentions. The user who downloads a file interprets it according to her own context of attitudes and intentions which may be quite different from what the author had in mind. To see this, we need only think of how the contents of the downloaded files might be interpreted differently by different users. For instance, a paper that I interpret as additional evidence in favor of a given argument might well be interpreted by someone else as an example of the value of publishing research on the internet. A song that I downloaded to add to my “listen to while writing” playlist may be part of someone else’s “fall asleep to” list.

One might disagree with my analysis and argue that the reproductive event is limited to the digital download which does not involve human agency. I do not believe that such an argument can be taken seriously, as it ignores the intentions both of the individuals who made the files available,

and of the end-users. In my view, the act of making the files available online and the act of downloading them can only be seen as intentional (because the download is not self-replicative), and, as a result, they are instances of social transmission rather than self-replication of memes. In the conclusion to his collection of thought-provoking papers by prominent defenders and detractors of memetics, Aunger (2000 c, 209-211) discusses such cases of artifact replication and makes a parallel point when he notes that:

“If culture is composed of information in people’s heads, then the duplication of artifacts does not necessarily help us to explain culture.” (ibid., 211)

In other words, unless we consider the meme replication or transmission mechanism as one that involves cognition, the issue surrounding the replication of memes has no bearing on culture.

According to Sperber (2000 b), the onus is on memeticists to support their claim that true cultural replication, akin to genetic replication, does indeed take place. In Sperber’s view, this depends on an important condition, overlooked by memeticists, that the properties of the reproduced item that make it similar to the original be inherited from the original (Sperber 2000 b, 169). This is not the case with communication or social learning as they involve inference rather than inheritance.

Sperber’s challenge is a hard one to meet, as biases always seem to play at least some small role in the spreading of culture. In his framework, these biases are (relevance-guided) “pre-existing dispositions to construe evidence in domain-specific structured ways” (ibid, 172), while in Boyd and Richerson’s framework, they are social transmission biases such as prestige and conformity.

The third road explored by Aunger (2002 and forthcoming a) seeks to save the notion of meme while recognizing the implausibility of a strict cultural replication mechanism for memes. He suggests that, although the biases introduced into social transmission both by a modular architecture and by learned transmission biases preclude the possibility of replication, they nonetheless have a “regularizing” effect on the inferential processes involved in transmission, “a kind of error-correction mechanism that guarantees that, despite the poverty of the stimulus, the “correct” inference is nevertheless routinely drawn from a signal or a message” (ibid, 5). In relevance-theoretic terms, rather than a “‘correct’ inference,” the outcome intended by the communicator is to produce the effects that benefit her by achieving a certain degree of relevance for the audience (see sections 2.3 and 3.3 above).

What Aunger proposes is a framework that recognizes the role of inference in communication (and thus accepts less-than-perfect replication), but sees modular architecture and transmission biases as providing the “heavy duty regularizing structures...that ensure that inferences take a certain form” (ibid.), in some way compensating for the lower fidelity that comes with inferential processes. His program, outlined in entertaining detail in his book *“The Electric Meme”* (2002), challenges colleagues to “find the first meme,” an endeavor whose benefits go beyond the scientific: Aunger suggests that the notion of a world without memes, one in which we all live in individual self-constructed “mental boxes,” is a lonely one, albeit one that makes culture “even more wonderful and amazing, if perhaps inscrutable,” (Aunger, 2002, 333). In my opinion, while the idea of living in isolated mental boxes may indeed appear lonely, the power of inferential communication is such that it can break through the loneliness barrier, yet still preserve each individual’s ability to understand without believing, and to consider different beliefs and attitudes without allowing them to enter indiscriminately into the practical reasoning mechanisms that

affect his behavior. I'll come back to this argument in Chapter 6, as it has clear implications for the role of marketing in consumer society.

So far in this chapter, I have sought to establish that communication and social learning and/or cultural transmission are inextricably entwined. The role of communication in the transmission of culture makes it subject to motivating forces, dispositions or biases whose adaptive nature can be exploited by communicators. I will now consider how and why such exploitation can be achieved. I have drawn attention at several points to the idea that, faced by resistance from their audience, communicators adapt their strategies to maintain their powers of manipulation, which are beneficial to them. This is discussed both by Friestad and Wright (1994), in the context of their persuasion knowledge model, and by Sperber (2000 a, 135), as an instance of the "persuasion/counterpersuasion arms race" in which each participant seeks to stay a step ahead of the other. Any individual, whether in the communicator's role or the audience's, uses her understanding of both manipulative and coping strategies to her advantage. Developing greater skills in one role increases the ability to exploit these same skills in the other role. These observations are presumably true from both ontogenetic and phylogenetic perspectives.

4. Co-opting social learning mechanisms

In order to trace the story of the "arms race," I'll briefly summarize, in this section, how the communicator might start by targeting the audience's attitudes (i.e., its beliefs and desires) and move on to targeting the audience's intentions, and, ultimately, their actions. As these strategies are repeatedly used, they might give rise to effort-saving heuristics. Let's consider how the story might unfold.

4.1. Producing intended effects on attitudes

From the communicator's point of view, as noted above, the function of communication is to produce specific cognitive effects in an audience. According to relevance theory, overt communication involves a communicative intention and an informative intention. The informative intention, as noted in Chapter 1, is to modify the audience's existing beliefs, assumptions and, more generally, its attitudes. The communicative intention is to have the informative intention recognized by the audience, creating a degree of overttness or transparency in communication. Overt (or ostensive-inferential communication), which involves both an informative and a communicative intention, is the standard form of communication among humans. We overtly inform others of what we see, what we feel, what we believe to be true (because we have either experienced it ourselves, inferred it from our experience, or been told of it). We also overtly inform others of what we want, what we intend to do, what others are doing, what others have told us, and what we would like them to do. Much of our communication consists in informing others of what we have learned via perception or inference, or from communication. A significant proportion of our utterances falls into the category of testimony: that is, conveying information about what we have observed first-hand. We often present this information along with some indication of our own attitude towards it or the amount of evidence we have for it. For example:

- (1) It looks like it's snowing again.
- (2) He must have been driving too fast.
- (3) I don't think Mary knows how to make this gizmo work.

(4) I'm so tired of hearing her complain.

In (1), the speaker observes that it is snowing and qualifies her statement that it is snowing with an indication that she is relying on her own observation. This may be because it has just started snowing and she is not sure that the few snowflakes that she has seen warrant the assertion that "it is snowing." In (2), the speaker also qualifies the claim, but, rather than having directly observed the event of someone driving too fast, she has reached this conclusion either from having observed or been told of the consequences of the fast-driving, such as skid-marks on the road or a car accident.

Utterance (3) expresses the result of observation or inference with a small degree of uncertainty. The speaker has either directly observed or concluded that Mary does not know how to make the gizmo work. Because the only evidence the speaker has is of Mary not getting the gizmo to work, she leaves open the possibility that Mary might indeed know how to make it work, and expresses this slight uncertainty. In (4), the speaker is a direct observer of the state of affairs about which she is expressing her impatience. In other words, she is reporting her own reactions to the state of affairs.

The four examples of testimony just discussed all involve either a claim based on direct observation or perception, or a conclusion based on direct observation or perception. However, I have argued above (in Section 1), that we tend to behave in ways that are most advantageous to ourselves and that, at times, this goal is not accomplished by providing truthful testimony, but rather by affecting the audience's attitudes to our own benefit. When the communicator's interest would not be best served by truthful testimony, it may be best secured by the use of some form of deception. A rational audience, recognizing this, should not blindly trust the communicator or assume that she has been cooperative in the sense of conveying genuine

rather than spurious information. As a consequence, the communicator may, on occasion, have reason to believe that her utterance may not have the intended effect on the audience's attitudes, either because she senses that the audience does not trust her, or because the audience holds a strongly entrenched attitude which may be hard to shift. In such cases, the communicator may resort to argumentation and offer reasons for the audience to adopt a particular attitude or belief. This can be done either truthfully, as in (5 and 6), or deceptively, as in (7 and 8):

(5) It must have started snowing again up there. Look! All the cars are coming down covered in snow.

(6) He must have been driving too fast. Can you see the skid marks on the road where he tried to stop?

(7) I'm just too tired to go to the movies. I'll probably fall asleep as soon as I sit down. (scenario: the speaker is actually not too tired, but does not feel like going to the movies)

(8) I'd love to take you around London on Saturday. I enjoy being a tourist for the day (scenario: the speaker pretends to enjoy an activity in order to make the audience accept the offer to take them around).

In (5) and (6), the speaker is simply pointing out the visible evidence on which she is basing her conclusions. It may be that the hearer is not able to observe the evidence as well (because he is not at the window in (5), or because he is reading a map in the car in (6)), or that the speaker simply wants to be a little more informative. In (7) and (8), the speaker provides an argument to make the attitudes she is expressing seem plausible. This second pair of utterances introduces some level of manipulation: neither the

attitudes expressed nor the arguments used to support them reflect the truth. So far, none of these utterances involve any persuasion, in my view, as the speaker simply intends to be believed, not to affect the hearer's own intentions or actions directly.

4.2. Producing intended effects on intentions

Just as a communicative intention can be fulfilled either by the use of testimony or with the additional help of an argument, a persuasive intention (i.e. an intention to cause the audience to adopt or modify an intention to act) can be fulfilled via a range of different strategies. In my account, a persuasive communicator is one who intends the audience to adopt the intention to perform a specific action as a result of the utterance (or other persuasive stimulus). A persuasive communicator intends her audience to adopt or modify not just an attitude, but an intention of its own, and, ultimately – if all goes well – an action. The process by which an intention is adopted or modified involves the individual committing to the performance of certain actions in aiming for coherence and consistency with his existing intentions and attitudes. As noted in Chapters 2 and 3, this process of intention formation is characterized by Bratman (1987) as a type of practical reasoning which may be either a full-fledged, effortful “elaborative” inference process or an efficient heuristic process (e.g. Petty and Cacioppo, 1986; Chaiken et al., 1996).

Social psychologists and consumer behavior researchers (ibid.) have long noted the existence of two “paths” to persuasion, as described in Chapter 3. In the case of advertising, the “elaborative” path might involve a consumer assessing the advertiser's claim that a given car offers the best value in the context of a range of set of assumptions such as how much he trusts the car manufacturer, his need for value vs. safety, and his intentions to buy a car in the near future; this may lead to his adopting the intention to buy now, wait, or ignore the advertised car. On the other hand, a consumer whose

intention it is to buy a safe car might buy one simply on reading that it is rated safest by a credible consumer group. Grounding persuasion within a practical reasoning framework enables us to analyze it as a rational, adaptive communicative phenomenon, and to link the two types of persuasive processes traditionally proposed by social psychologists to a wider framework of current research on reasoning and rationality. The full picture we paint also gains considerable light from the introduction of relevance considerations at every step of the practical reasoning process.

As noted in Chapter 4, more direct and less cooperative attempts to modify the audience's actions or intentions that would not fall under the category of persuasion might include threats, physical coercion, or the use of mind-altering substances when the audience has virtually no rational alternative but to perform the act intended by the communicator. Ordering is an interesting borderline case. To the extent that the target is able to ignore the order and accept the negative consequences of his action, thus engaging in rational intention formation, orders may still be seen as cases of persuasion, albeit extreme ones, as in the following examples:

(9) Scenario: mother speaking to young child, relying on blind obedience. "Wear your ski goggles today."

(10) Scenario: School rules require that all children wear boots when it is raining. Teacher, relying on authority, says: "Everybody is to put on their boots."

(11) Scenario: Firefighter (relying on fear) yells up to man at 1st floor window of burning house: "Jump!"

In each of these cases, the communicator is relying on the audience's strongly held attitude or intention (a child's disposition to obey her parents or teacher, and a high degree of physical fear) to accomplish her goal.

While there is clearly no coercion, the risks associated with non-compliance are too high for the audiences to consider taking. In (9), which is the example in which the risk of non-compliance for the hearer is probably the lowest, the mother is relying on some level of cooperation based on her authority.

In more typical cases of persuasion, the contextual factors of blind obedience, authority, fear and so on cannot be relied on (either because they are not part of the relationship between the two interlocutors, or because they are not sufficiently strong). So the communicator must appeal to the audience's rationality. Roughly speaking, we might want to think of persuasion as being to an audience's intentions what testimony and argumentation are to an audience's beliefs. In providing testimony and/or argumentation, a communicator's intention is for the audience to form a particular belief with a particular degree of strength. In engaging in persuasive communication, a communicator's intention is for the audience to adopt or modify an intention as a result of holding this belief. The belief underlying the adopted intention will itself have been formed as intended by the communicator via the most appropriate type of communication – testimony, argumentation or other.

4.3. From meaningful signs to heuristic persuasive strategies

In order to persuade an audience, a communicator first relies on the audience's desire for relevant and true information. Providing such information will fulfill a communicator's informative intention; however, it may not be enough to alter the audience's intentions in the way the persuasive communicator intends. I have argued that the persuasive communicator's higher-order intention is fulfilled by specifically targeting the audience's higher-order intention. The communicator relies on the audience's tendency to behave adaptively and fulfill her own intentions (by seeking relevant information and using it to form intentions to engage in

self-beneficial, or adaptive, behavior). In both informing and persuading, the communicator aims to produce a stimulus which will take advantage of the audience's naturally adaptive tendency to acquire relevant information and use it in a self-beneficial manner.

In the case of persuasion, the communicator aims to modify the audience's intention structure, and relies on the audience's own practical reasoning processes to complete the task. Intentions are structured hierarchically in such a way that the fulfillment of higher-order intentions requires the adoption and fulfillment of lower-order intentions. In order to fulfill my intention to work, I must find a job, which necessitates updating my CV, for which, in turn, I must install a newer version of Word, etc. Thus, higher-order intentions serve as inputs to practical reasoning and, in Bratman's terms, "pose a problem," since they require one to choose between several ways of fulfilling these intentions. These options are screened against the background of one's existing intentions, desires and beliefs. The output of this process is the selection of one course of action and, as commitment to it develops, the adoption of a new intention. Built into these practical reasoning processes are mechanisms that ensure both rationality and efficiency by taking advantage of regularities and creating what Bratman calls habits, dispositions and norms, which others might call heuristics, (e.g. Gigerenzer and Selten, 2001).

I have suggested that the ability to persuade by modifying the audience's intentions has evolved from an initial reliance on testimony, through the development of argumentation, to the use of heuristic tactics specifically aimed at modifying an audience's intentions. All three strategies are available to the competent persuasive communicator. The use of testimony simply informs the audience of some state of affairs and relies on the audience's trust in the communicator to lead to the desired effects. The use of argumentation offers evidence for a desired conclusion, or reasons for adopting it. In persuasive communication, the communicator's aim (to

modify the audience's beliefs and desires in order to modify their intentions) can be accomplished via testimony, argumentation or the use of a heuristic strategy. Choosing between these methods is itself a heuristic process undertaken by a persuasive communicator. Here is an illustration of different types of utterance that might result from the choice of different methods to fulfill a given persuasive intention (persuading a target to drink more milk), as we move from direct observation to testimony to argumentation to heuristic persuasive strategy:

(12) Direct observation (for instance, to oneself): "People who drink milk seem in better health"

(13) Testimony: Mother says to child, "Drinking milk makes bones stronger."

(14) Argumentation: Health Science textbook for primary school children: "Milk contains high levels of calcium. Calcium helps build strong bones. Milk is an excellent source of calcium. Drink milk!"

(15) Heuristic strategy: Television commercial shows famous sports star drinking glass of milk and saying: "It worked for me!"

I believe that this analysis of the evolution of persuasive strategies can be taken one step further. In Chapter 3, I discussed the work by Cialdini (1993, 2001), who found that persuasive tactics used by individuals whose job it is to persuade (salespeople, marketing executives and so on) fall into six categories. In Chapter 4 (Section 4.1), I claimed that these persuasive tactics derive their effectiveness from the fact that they share some of the

characteristics of broader adaptive mechanisms. In Section 3.4 of this chapter, I identified the adaptive mechanisms which I claim lend their function and effectiveness to the persuasive tactics listed by Cialdini: they are the transmission biases which have evolved to make social learning more efficient and to enable cumulative cultural evolution (Boyd and Richerson, 1985). Having examined one of these transmission biases, prestige, in some detail above, I now suggest that, in the same way as they are inclined to learn from models on whom they have conferred prestige, individuals may also tend to be more easily persuaded by individuals on whom they have conferred prestige. It is also plausible that prestigious individuals and others working on their behalf, or employing them, may seek to use their conferred prestige in order to fulfill their persuasive intentions. Indeed, Cialdini's persuasive tactic of "authority," which suggests that targets are more easily persuaded by individuals whom they perceive to be in a situation of authority, seems to appeal to the prestige bias. In other words, professional persuasive communicators use the adaptive mechanism of the prestige bias as an effective persuasive tactic.

Along the same lines, I also discussed (Chapter 4, Section 4.1) Cialdini's persuasive tactic of "social proof," according to which "individuals commonly decide on appropriate behaviors for themselves in a given situation by employing information as to how certain similar others have behaved or are behaving there (Cialdini and Trost, 1998, 171)⁸. This tactic owes its effectiveness, in my view, to the transmission bias of conformity. According to Henrich and Boyd (1998, 219), "conformist transmission implies that individuals possess a propensity to preferentially adopt the cultural traits that are most frequent in the population." We can imagine how this conformist bias might have been co-opted by communicators with

⁸ In this more recent article, Cialdini and Trost refer to this tactic as "social validation," rather than "social proof."

a persuasive intention, and, because of its success as a persuasive tactic, used with increasing regularity and efficiency. Examples of the use of the social proof tactic are numerous:

(16) Nine out of 10 families prefer X toothpaste.

(17) You've got to go to the party, everyone else is going

(18) Join the millions of satisfied customers who've switched from X to Y.

Another tactic observed by Cialdini is "reciprocity." In using reciprocity as a persuasive tactic, a communicator tacitly invites the audience to offer her a benefit in exchange for an apparently altruistic action. Research in evolutionary psychology and anthropology (Cosmides, 1989; Premack and Premack, 1994; Bowles and Gintis, 1999; Fiddick et al., 2000) and game theory (Axelrod, 1984), has shown how individuals engage in both positive reciprocal behavior (responding cooperatively to altruism) and negative reciprocal behavior (retaliating, sometimes at a cost to themselves, in the face of defection). Here again, I am suggesting that the adaptive benefits of engaging in reciprocal behavior can be manipulated for persuasive purposes and that this type of manipulation has evolved into an effective persuasive tactic. This is the tactic behind such marketing programs as free giveaways, tryout offers, supermarket samples etc. In non-marketing settings, this tactic can involve gift-giving or can take the form of a seemingly gratuitous compliment or apology in response to which the target reciprocates by fulfilling the communicator's persuasive intention. For instance:

(19) Teacher: “I know a good boy who is going to put all his books away quickly.”

The general pattern I am suggesting is one in which persuasive stimuli crafted from adaptive mechanisms (e.g., prestige, conformity, reciprocity or taking advantage of scarcity) may have evolved into persuasive heuristic tactics. These resulting tactics enable persuasive communicators to circumvent some of the resistance exhibited by cautious audiences. Whether it relies on the target processing the persuasive stimulus heuristically or elaboratively, a communicator’s use of such a stimulus is a heuristic itself, as it is unlikely that most persuasive communicators reflect on their use of a certain tactic when communicating to persuade, and even less likely that they would link such a tactic to a social transmission bias.

As discussed in section 2.1, Sperber and Hirschfeld (2004) show that a manipulative communicator can provide a stimulus that meets a module’s input conditions even though it does not necessarily belong to the module’s proper domain (*ibid.*, 41). The possibility of a mismatch between a module’s proper and actual domains allows such a communicator to exploit a hypothetical “learn from experts” module by, for instance, positioning herself as an expert and offering information that appears to be beneficial to the audience. In other words, the pattern of evolution of persuasive tactics which I am suggesting is an application of the more general, relevance-driven, manipulative strategy discussed by Sperber, in which a stimulus is crafted to satisfy the input of a specific module.

5. Communicating on one's own terms: coping

5.1. Coherence-checking and argumentation

As noted at the beginning of this chapter, Sperber (2001) argues that the tension between the “epistemic norms” of communication and its function of producing desirable effects for communicators has led to the evolution of a coherence-checking ability, which enables audiences to examine the consistency of communicated information with their existing beliefs, thus defending themselves against misinformation or deception.

I also mentioned (Section 2) some parallel work in developmental psychology by Harris (2002), who shows that children pay more attention to the consistency of communicated information with their existing beliefs than to the trustworthiness of its source. Thus, Harris suggests that children are equipped with a “filtering device” that enables them to examine communicated information for consistency and coherence with their existing representation of the world. Harris’s filtering device closely resembles Sperber’s coherence-checking ability. Information inconsistent with existing assumptions is rejected unless clearly marked as fiction or supposition.

Sperber argues that this coherence-checking mechanism is an evolved domain-specific module that is specialized for use in communication, starting out as a defense against misinformation. On the communicator’s side, the ability to elaborate arguments evolves as a response, as communicators who fear that the audience will distrust them emphasize the coherence or consistency of the information offered with beliefs already held by the audience. According to Harris, the filtering device used by children operates “before the emergence of reflective judgment,” (Harris, 2002, 315). Sperber’s coherence-checking mechanism applies automatically to communicated information. I suspect that the two mechanisms are the same, and that Harris’s work supports the modular

view of social learning defended by Sperber rather than the non-modular perspective favored by Boyd and Richerson.

5.2. Evolution of coping strategies

While coherence-checking is an appropriate coping strategy for possibly deceptive uses of testimony and argumentation, audiences also need to cope with persuasive attempts ranging from the use of testimony and argumentation to the more sophisticated exploitations of learning mechanisms and transmission biases. In these cases, the coherence of communicated information with existing beliefs is not the issue, and cannot provide an adequate defense on its own. Rather, rationality considerations that apply to practical reasoning are required. According to Bratman (1987), these are specific dispositions, habits or norms which control the deliberations and evaluation processes that lead to intention formation and/or modification (see discussion in Chapter 4, Section 5.3). These processes can themselves be fully elaborative, or draw on heuristic processes for greater efficiency. Depending on how much the individual is willing to rely on heuristics instead of expending the effort on elaborative processing, he will set these parameters to more or less sensitive settings. These decision-making processes are themselves potential targets for manipulation by a sophisticated communicator. On the target side, evolution is driven by the need for efficiency in performing the information-gathering function of communication, while on the manipulator side, it is driven by the exploitive function of communication. The ability to fine-tune the parameters that govern these intention formation mechanisms and to review them quickly and efficiently depending on contextual variables is clearly important if the target is to stay a step ahead of the persuader.

6. Conclusion

I have discussed the evolution of persuasive strategies in an evolutionary perspective. However much more short-term factors may turn out to have a substantial effect on this evolutionary process. One such factor is the rapidly increasing use of communication in the media in general, and specifically for marketing purposes. Consumer behavior researchers have documented the increased sophistication of audiences in general, and children and adolescents in particular, in recognizing and resisting marketing strategies. The marketing industry responds by searching for ever more effective ways of selling and persuading. How these strategies will continue evolving, and what their effects are likely to be beyond the realm of marketing and media, is anyone's guess. However, we can venture some very general predictions. There is a significant difference between this persuasion/counterpersuasion spiral effect in marketing and the more general evolution of communication prior to the acceleration of the media culture. While I pointed out earlier in this chapter that the roles of communicator and audience are assumed by the same individuals more or less in alternation, the same is not necessarily true in the case of media and marketing. Clearly there is a dissociation of the two roles of persuader and target in these forms of communication, which may lead to increasing aggressiveness and lack of trust between the two groups. I will explore these issues further in the next and final chapter.

CHAPTER SIX

THE BUSINESS OF PERSUASION

1. Introduction

Although I have included some marketing-related examples in the previous chapters, I have not yet discussed the implications of the account of persuasion developed in this thesis for marketing. This may seem somewhat ironic for two reasons. The first is that the initial intention behind this thesis was to write primarily about marketing from a relevance-theoretic perspective. My focus on persuasion only developed as a result of my frustrated efforts to find an account of persuasion that seemed to fit my own intuitions and experience of the processes involved in marketing. As it turns out, while marketing plays an important “behind the scenes” part in the construction of my examples and in providing the intuitions that I wanted my framework to capture, the theory took over and didn’t leave much time or space for extensive case studies or illustrations. The second reason why this is ironic is that marketing is not only a particularly compelling illustration of persuasion, but, as I will argue in this chapter, an important factor in the evolution of the cultural phenomenon of persuasive communication. So, this final chapter will be entirely devoted to marketing and, more specifically, to showing how the framework proposed in the thesis accounts for much of what can be observed in the practice of marketing.

I will apply the persuasion framework to analyzing some of the multifaceted strategies used in marketing. According to this framework, the central features of persuasion are its reliance on the causal role of

intention structures and practical reasoning, its use of adaptive social intelligence and cultural transmission processes, and its basis in the cognitive and communicative principles of relevance. I will try to show that these general features of persuasion can shed valuable light on the seemingly disparate range of strategies in marketing. Importantly, recognizing that these strategies are all instances of persuasion brings into question the claim often made by marketing professionals that their branding activities are more geared to satisfying needs and building relationships than to changing people's minds. I will argue that branding, for instance, is not ultimately intended to reveal a product's personality so customers can establish a feel-good rapport with it: rather it is a persuasive strategy with specific tactics whose effectiveness is readily accounted for within the adaptive persuasion framework I have developed. By showing how all marketing activities fall squarely within the domain of persuasion, I hope to extend the conclusions I have drawn about persuasive communication to marketing itself, offering a new perspective on its complex mechanisms and providing some further insight into its controversial role in consumer societies.

The word "marketing," while often mistakenly treated as synonymous with "advertising", encompasses all steps required to "bring an item to market." Because advertising is the most visible and recognizable form of marketing, consumers often think of marketing and advertising as one and the same process. However, bringing a product or service, or sometimes an idea, to market includes much more than advertising it. An item, or its brand, is first developed in such a way that it is likely to appeal to consumers in a given market. The item is then manufactured, produced or packaged for sale or release, and/or consumption. Launching the item involves displaying it at the point of sale, making consumers aware of it, explaining its features to consumers and differentiating it from other similar items, in order to change the

consumers' intentions so that they will acquire and/or consume it at least once, and preferably, repeatedly. Practically speaking, the development of a product begins with the identification of an unmet need among consumers, or of an opportunity in the market resulting from a change in the competitive environment or in the firm's product strategy. There follows a careful elaboration process, which includes some testing in the target market, feedback and improvements. Before the product is released, marketers will determine how to "position" the product in the market, what existing products to compete with and on what terms (prices, market share, service, value, expertise etc.). The fact that a particular strategy is being used is sometimes transparent to consumers, as in the case of price wars, which tend to occur frequently in highly competitive markets, such as airlines on North Atlantic routes or the top supermarket chains. From the choice of a particular strategy follow a range of further decisions, about how the product is to be distributed (via a network of retailers or directly to consumers via the Internet), for instance. Next, marketers consider point-of-sale issues such as where the product will be sold, including details such as shelf-space, packaging, in-store promotional activity and staff training. This is, of course a very general overview of a product development plan, and the details are likely to vary greatly with the type of product or service being marketed.

Throughout the entire marketing planning process and while the product or service is being prepared for its launch, marketers build an integrated communication strategy that ranges from packaging to public relations, promotions, direct mail, advertising, training of point-of-sale and/or customer service staff, websites, etc. All of these activities, usually grouped together under the general label of "branding," are carefully choreographed and coordinated so as to build on each other for consistency and effectiveness. The main goal of these activities is to

communicate an integrated set of indications to consumers using a range of media and delivery methods. Not only are these indications meant to reinforce each other, but they are also aimed at building a composite picture in consumers' minds of what the product (or range of products) is, what it does, to whom it is targeted and its attributes, or the benefits it offers a customer. This composite picture is known as a 'brand', a term I will explore in some detail in the next section. By focusing on the persuasive effects of branding, I hope to show that what makes marketing persuasive is much more than a well-chosen word, metaphor or picture in a magazine ad or television commercial, as is sometimes suggested in both academic and non-academic writings. Marketing is a much broader process, which involves building and spreading¹ a brand whose representations in the minds of consumers will steer their practical reasoning processes towards the intended outcome.

2. Brands, concepts and brand equity

The notion of brand reaches far beyond marketing and plays an important part in everyday life in consumer societies. However, outside the fields of marketing and academic marketing research, little thought has been given to what actually constitutes a brand and what role it plays in fulfilling marketers' intentions and affecting consumers' intentions. Marketers, marketing academics and consumers all use the word "brand" loosely, and often, inconsistently. The inconsistencies come from two main sources. First, "brand" is sometimes used to refer

¹ By "spreading" here, I mean the form of non-replicative transmission that contributes to the "epidemiology of representations" (Sperber, 1996), discussed in Chapter 5. It can take place via channels such as mass media, the internet, word-of-mouth and as a result of personal experience with a product or service.

to specific products (e.g. the drink “Coca Cola”) and, at other times, to ranges of products made, sold, or distributed by the same company (e.g. “Coca Cola” can refer to Coca Cola Classic, Diet Coke, Cherry Coke, Decaffeinated Coke, etc.), or even to the company as a whole (e.g. “Coca Cola” can refer to The Coca Cola Company). Second, a brand is also a mental construct which exists in the minds and strategic plans of teams of designers and/or marketers, on the one hand, and the minds of consumers, on the other. Often, what consumers perceive as a brand is very different from what marketers intend brands to be. Between these two domains stands marketing, the communicative process that seeks to translate a brand from the corporate domain to the consumer domain.

2.1. The marketer’s perspective

Let’s first consider the application of the term “brand”: does it apply to single products or ranges of products, or is it simply the name of the company printed on the packaging of a product and in the ads? In a way that is unusual among artifacts, because of trademark and patent laws, the designers of the product and the marketers of the brand name have some control over how broad a range of items a given brand name applies to. So, by naming a new music player an “iPod,” Apple designates the range of items that can be called “iPods.” As it develops new music players, Apple can choose to call some of them iPods, but may, in the future, launch music players under different names if their features differ significantly enough from those of iPods, or if they simply need to create a new brand. The history of a product’s development plays a role in determining how the brand name is applied. In the case of Coca Cola, the original beverage gave its name to the company that developed it as a soda fountain product. Much later, additional lines of beverages were developed as variations or extensions of the product. These include drinks that fall into the generic category

of “colas” (not a brand, but a type of drink such as “juice” or “coffee”), and are sometimes designated by the extended brand name of Coca Cola (or its nickname, Coke). Other non-cola beverages were also developed and sold by the Coca Cola Company under different brand names. In the late 1980’s and 1990’s, the Coca Cola Company even tried to extend its brand to one of the largest movie studios, by buying Columbia Pictures and renaming parts of its operations Coca Cola Entertainment. The acquisition strategy was as flawed as the branding strategy, and Coca Cola had to sell its Hollywood investment and refocus its business on beverages. While it is undeniable that Coca Cola has become an “iconic brand” (Holt, 2004), the limits of its branding were clearly tested in the case of the studio acquisition. On the other hand, it is probably of some advantage to the Coca Cola Company that the brand name is applied to a wider range of products than the original drink itself, including other Coca Cola products, and possibly other brands of colas, or possibly generic colas. How far this extension of a brand’s name can be taken is a central issue in marketing. It is a function of how effectively marketers can communicate their intended notion of what constitutes their brand, a challenge that succeeds only to the extent that the audience is willing and able to fulfill the communicator’s informative intention.

2.2. The consumer’s perspective

From the consumer’s perspective, a brand is a label that is applied to a given product (or a range of products). As I will try to show in this section, the consumer constructs her own representation of a given brand, based on her own experience, information gathered from other consumers and/or her exposure to marketing stimuli. Marketing stimuli can come in many forms, through many different media: the shape of the container, its position on supermarket shelves, the reviews on

consumer websites, the celebrity spokesperson's lifestyle interviews, the catchy tune used in TV commercials, the humor of the magazine ads, the newspaper coupons, the word-of-mouth testimonials, the 2-for-1 offers, and so on. Some of these stimuli, such as coupons and promotional offers, fall squarely into the domain of persuasion, and carry a specific message designed to get the consumer to buy in order to save or benefit, a "call-to-action." Others, such as the shape of a container or its position on supermarket shelves, may not appear to consumers in general to be obvious examples of persuasion. Whether consumers recognize them as persuasive stimuli, or not, they clearly originate in the marketer's specific intention to penetrate consumers' intention structures so they will purchase and/or consume the product.

As the consumer becomes more familiar with the product, the public brand name becomes associated in her mind with a particular mentally represented concept. Each concept is associated with what is sometimes called an "encyclopedic entry," a structured repository of information about the object it designates (e.g., Wilson, 2004). Included in this repository are attributes of the object that have been acquired in the course of the individual's encounters with the object (or group of objects, or company) in many different situations. These attributes are stored in complex conceptual networks that interconnect and link up with each other in various ways. This type of structure, in which a label is linked to a bank of information in the mind, is not particular to brands. It is simply an instance of the types of structures that are associated with concepts in general.

In the framework of relevance theory (Sperber and Wilson, 1986, 1995, 1998), concepts are seen as consisting of a mental label, or conceptual address, which gives access to a range of stored information, linguistic, logical and encyclopedic. All this information is activated to some degree when thoughts and utterances containing the label (or its

associated word) are processed, the goal being to select and use the information that is likely to contribute most to relevance. My interest here is in the mental label, or conceptual address, itself, and the encyclopedic information stored under that address, which in this case designates a brand.

A brand name, as we have seen, can be applied either to a specific product, or to a range of products or to an entire company. While consumers choose to buy a product because of its own attributes, they also tend to assume that some of the attributes of a particular product are shared by a wider range of similar products, especially if encouraged to do so by the right marketing. Conversely, a consumer's representation of a brand may include only a subset of its actual attributes, either because she has not become aware of the full range of attributes (through exposure to marketing or from direct experience), or because only some these attributes are relevant to her. Let's consider these two cases in more detail.

A brand name (say Coca Cola) that originally applies specifically to one product may be extended (by consumers) to apply to other products which share the same encyclopedic attributes. The result is an extended name, denoting a wider category of similar products, thus creating wider categories, containing either competing products, or ranges of products from the same manufacturer. For example, "Kleenex" can become a common noun denoting a wide range of disposable tissues. This process of category extension can take place in the mind of the consumers, whether or not it was intended by the marketer. As noted above, a consumer may also apply the brand name to a narrower range of products, or a product with a narrower range of attributes, than intended by the marketer. For instance, a customer of the local bank branch may use the name of the bank to refer only to her particular branch, and may have a representation of the bank which contains only

encyclopedic properties of the branch she uses. For this customer, the brand name of her huge multi-national bank denotes only her “corner” branch. She would, however, be able to broaden the denotation without much difficulty if she goes to another town, recognizes the name and realizes that a more abstract category for a bank with several different branches is needed.

Deirdre Wilson (2004) argues that most words in a language undergo similar broadening and narrowing processes as they are used in context. She claims that both broadening and narrowing are driven by the search for relevance, with stored encyclopedic attributes being used to define broader or narrower categories. In Wilson’s words:

“The linguistically encoded meaning (of a word, a phrase, a sentence) is no more than a clue to the speaker’s meaning, which is not decoded but non-demonstratively inferred,”
(ibid.,17)

It follows that there is no “presumption of literalness” (Wilson, 2004, 17): the same word (e.g., “Coca Cola,” “Kleenex”) may be used to pick out a broader or narrower category of objects on different occasions, depending on the audience’s relevance-guided ability to infer the communicator’s intentions. Thus, the flexibility of word meanings in general, and brand names in particular, should come as no surprise.

In the specific case of brands, the consumer picks up clues about encyclopedic attributes of the brand from different sources. Some of these clues come from ads, promotional messages, special offers, contests and the like, and are overtly used by marketers. Among the stimuli that are not overtly used by marketers, some come from other overt communicative sources, such as word-of-mouth, advice from friends, media coverage, consumer reports, independent reviews and

ever growing ranges of internet-based information sources; others are used by the marketer in less overt forms (e.g., packaging design, shelf-positioning, price, etc.). As a result of processing these stimuli, the representation that a consumer has of a brand can be considerably narrower or broader than the one intended by the marketer, the “keeper of the brand.” A bank customer may represent the bank’s brand as using only that subset of attributes of the bank that are most relevant to her. Unless she is a world traveler, the customer may not care whether her bank has branches in Hong Kong, Sydney or San Francisco, or provides merchant banking services, as long as there is a convenient branch around the corner that satisfies her own banking requirements and that enables her to think about the bank in relevant ways.

Conversely, the time-constrained executive who has no preference for whether her documents travel by FedEx, DHL or UPS might think of all of them generically as “FedEx,” and refer to them as such because the important attributes (e.g., speed, reliability, trackability, money-back guarantee) of an overnight delivery service that matter to her are activated in her own mind, by the word “FedEx.” This particular type of broadening, or loose use, is referred to as “genericide” in the marketing literature (e.g. Keller, 2001). It has happened with brand names such as Coke, Hoover (in the UK), Kleenex (Wilson, (2004, 3), Xerox and, as just seen, for FedEx. While not specifically intended by brand managers, this type of broadening may sometimes be advantageous as it elevates the brand’s status to that of a standard for a particular category of goods. In some cases, however, genericide is vigorously resisted by the brand’s managers as it jeopardizes the brand’s trademark.

2.3. Brand equity

The conceptual representation of a brand shared by large segments of a market is what marketers recognize as a brand's equity. It consists of the collective information that is stored in millions of individual minds about the given brand. This equity, which is neither directly observable nor readily measurable, is the result of all the marketing efforts focused on the brand, and of consumers' experience of the product(s) that fall under it. It is important to note that, since consumers construct their own concept for a given brand, brand equity is not fully controlled by the marketer herself. There can be a less-than-perfect mapping between the representation that the marketer intends to create and the brand equity that has built up in millions of consumers' minds. Brands actually do carry "equity," an economic value that, in the case of publicly traded companies, is reflected in the share price.

To the extent that they control it, marketers try to "leverage" brand equity beyond a single product by extending it to ranges of products or to the corporate name itself. This is very different from the broadening of the brand in consumers' minds discussed in Section 2.2. Usually, extension products are clearly identified as such in order to "piggy back" on the original product's brand equity. There are risks associated with these extension strategies, as they may end up "diluting" brand equity sufficiently that the brand name becomes associated with a range of encyclopedic attributes too diffuse to be of any relevance (Meyvis and Janiszewski, 2004; John, Loken and Joiner, 1998). This may have happened when Coca Cola attempted to extend its brand to the movie business. However, although the product name Coca Cola appeared first with, and still refers to, Coca Cola Classic, the brand has been effectively extended to at least some related products.

In this section, I have tried to show that marketing strategies can run the gamut from clear-cut persuasive stimuli to "brand-building"

messages, but they are all specifically crafted in order to persuade. It is therefore important for a theory of persuasion to accommodate and provide insight into the full range of strategies. Although the most obvious and overt marketing strategies (e.g., advertising) are often cited as examples of persuasion, and are readily detected and “coped with” (in the sense discussed by Friestad and Wright, 1994; see above, Chapter 4, Section 5.3), many aspects of branding are less overt. It is therefore an interesting exercise to see how well the persuasion framework I have developed in this thesis applies to the full range of cases. I will now consider this in the next section.

3. Branding and persuasion

As they are exposed to the many different types of stimuli discussed in Section 2.2, consumers construct mental representations that are likely to stabilize into full-fledged concepts, with a fixed denotation and associated encyclopedic information, which will expand as a result of subsequent interactions with the brand, through experience with the products, or billboards, posters, ads, jingles, packaging, product-placement in movies and TV shows, clothing logos, etc. These types of encyclopedic knowledge structures are in the consumer research literature referred to as “associative networks” (e.g. Peter and Olson, 2001; Henderson et al., 1998; Keller, 2001). A brand is seen as the nucleus of a network with numerous branches, representing attributes that are stored under the encyclopedic entry for the brand. As noted above, this fits well with the general account of concepts proposed in relevance theory and other cognitive science approaches.

3.1. Strength and salience of brand attributes

There are several ways in which the attributes of a brand can vary in an individual's conceptual representation of that brand. Among the important features of the treatment of encyclopedic attributes in relevance theory are the notions of strength and salience (or accessibility). I discussed the notion of strength of assumptions in Chapter 4, Section 5.1: the better evidenced an assumption, the stronger it is, and the greater its potential contribution to relevance. An encyclopedic attribute is in fact an assumption: to say that Coca Cola has the encyclopedic attribute of "tasting good," is equivalent to saying that the encyclopedic information stored for Coca Cola includes the assumption that "Coca Cola tastes good." Concept attributes can vary in strength, in the same way as any other assumption, as a function of the reliability of the source from which the information was first obtained, and its subsequent processing history. Information acquired by direct observation will generally be stronger than information overtly communicated by marketers, and will be regarded as more reliable in the case of a clash. Moreover, the strength of a particular brand attribute will directly affect the strength of the conclusions it is used to derive. Stronger attributes result in the strongest conclusions, and therefore greater cognitive effects. As a result, stronger attributes contribute more to relevance and play a greater role in practical reasoning, all other factors being equal. An academic researcher who uses electronic journals and academic search engines for online research may read about the development of Google Scholar, a new search engine for academic literature, with some skepticism. Her representation of the Google brand, which had not included the attribute "facilitates academic research," now includes a rather weak version of this attribute (as she does not strongly believe that a "mass market" search engine could successfully move into such a specialized area).

However, after trying the engine, she is impressed enough with the results that the attribute “facilitates academic research” in her representation of the Google brand is greatly strengthened. As a result, she may well use this search engine as part of her regular academic routine.

Another important feature in the representation of brand is salience. Both the attributes of a brand and the brand itself may be more or less salient, depending on how frequently they are activated. Attributes that have been activated more frequently, or more recently tend to be more salient. Salience is dealt with in relevance theory under the heading “accessibility.” A conceptual address, or one of the encyclopedic attributes it makes available, will be more or less accessible depending on factors such as recency of use, frequency of use, strength, and past processing history (including likelihood of giving rise to further cognitive effects). Thus, the salience of a brand, or of an encyclopedic attribute of a brand, is important to a relevance-oriented cognitive system, as the intuitions of marketing researchers suggest.

Mentally represented brands give access to sets of attributes that can relate to each other in a wide variety of ways. Brands that share attributes can be mentally grouped together as an extended category: some are interconnected to each other, and some divide up into subcategories and further sub-subcategories. Brands whose attributes overlap can be more or less consciously compared for their ability to fulfill a particular goal or intention. Some of these linked structures belong to the same product family and represent extension products (e.g., Coke, Diet Coke, Cherry Coke, Vanilla Coke; Google, Google Scholar, Google Mail, Google Search Bar), while others may belong to the same category of items and represent competing products (Pepsi vs. Coke; Yahoo vs. Google). It is the unlimited possibility of combining these structures that gives brands their dynamic aspect. If an attribute

such as “facilitates academic research” can come to link two concepts or brands such as “library” and “Google” into a broader category, we can see how attributes can provide the ingredients for constructing innovative solutions to the problems posed by our practical reasoning processes. How the attributes of a brand trigger intention adoption is the issue I examine next. I will try to show that it is the missing link in my argument that the crafting of a brand is as effective a strategy for affecting consumers’ intentions as more overt forms of persuasive marketing. In fact, the two types of strategies typically work together, as information acquired from marketing stimuli is added to the encyclopedic entry for a brand, and may therefore contribute to future product selection. Similarly, attributes stored in the encyclopedic entry for a brand provide some of the context in which marketing stimuli are processed and interpreted, thus affecting the relevance of thoughts or utterances about the brand.

3.2. The role of concepts in practical reasoning

Having discussed conceptual representations, and shown how encyclopedic attributes stored in memory account for the dynamic properties of concepts, I will now consider how these dynamic properties may contribute to practical reasoning. Barsalou (1991) discusses the idea that new mentally represented categories may be constructed in order to fulfill the individual’s intentions. I will show how this insight, combined with Bratman’s (1987) account of practical reasoning, can explain the less overt form of persuasion via marketing that is product branding.

According to Barsalou (Barsalou, 1991; Ratneshwar et al., 2001), salient goals may lead (via backwards inference), to the construction of new ad hoc categories. For instance, when planning a vacation with a specific goal in mind (e.g., resting on a deserted beach), a number of

candidate locations with the attributed “deserted beaches” could be retrieved (e.g., Tahiti, Fiji, Greece, the Seychelles, the Maldives), and further evaluated against a range of background goals and constraints (e.g. distance, price, political situation, etc.). Clearly, this process of attribute instantiation and selection is relevance-guided. The set of candidate locations forms a category that is derived in an ad hoc manner in order to satisfy a specific salient goal. Once a location has been selected, the fulfillment of the higher-order goal requires the adoption of a lower-order intention to undertake the appropriate actions for bringing it about. For instance, if Fiji is selected as the location with the best combination of attributes given the individual’s salient goals and background constraints, adopting the intention to travel to Fiji (with all the resulting lower-order intentions) is necessary for fulfillment of the original salient intention.

This type of account, in which a concept’s attributes are activated by mentally-represented goals or intentions, differs in some respects from Bratman’s (1987) planning process described in Chapter 2. In Bratman’s account, it is the hierarchical structure of intentions that results in lower-order intentions being derived from higher-order ones against a background of mentally-represented beliefs and intentions. The concept activation process shares many features with the planning processes described by Bratman, but places greater emphasis on the role of concepts in practical reasoning. I believe that the treatment of branding as a type of persuasion illustrates and confirms that concepts play an important role in practical reasoning. Thus, in addition to playing an important inferential role in communication, concept attributes also contribute to practical reasoning by activating a range of possible solutions to a given planning problem (i.e., a means-end incoherence problem, cf. Bratman (1987)). I will argue in the next section that marketers building a brand exploit the same set of

persuasive and adaptive heuristics that I have described in earlier chapters as underlying virtually all persuasive communication. These heuristics facilitate persuasion both in the case of overt persuasive attempts and via less overt forms of brand building. Marketers specifically exploit these heuristics when crafting a brand whose features are intended to result in persuasive effects.

4. Culture, function and consumption

Consumers choose to consume goods and services that enable them to meet certain needs and fulfill certain intentions. These needs and intentions are multi-layered. At the most basic level, fulfilling physical needs such as basic nutrition, health, clothing, hygiene, housing and the like, rarely involves any choice of brands². Once these basic needs are fulfilled, consumers make choices and form intentions according to their resources, their personal preferences and the culture in which they live. In Western societies, this layer may include the need (or preference) for education, entertainment, physical activity and, moving further up the scale away from necessities, leisure pursuits, fashion, more sophisticated eating, etc. These choices are greatly influenced by culture, and also help to define culture. In other words, while culture is an important factor in our choices, by making these choices we contribute to further defining culture and our role within this culture. So, for instance, for a 10-year old London schoolboy, eating an apple during break provides nutrition, but it is also a choice that is made according to both cultural and personal preferences. Beyond their nutritional benefits, apples constitute the snack of choice for health-

² The only choice under at this level may be between fulfilling one of these basic needs rather than another.

conscious 10-year olds because they demonstrate that one has moved on from little kids' snacks and seeks healthier foods than the potato chip-eating crowd. Having an apple for a snack helps identify one as a full-fledged "older boy", and differentiate one from "little boys". At the same time, the effect of the group members all eating their apples is to further reinforce the culture of the group. An apple-marketer trying to infiltrate the playground would probably want to base her marketing campaign both on the nutritional benefits of apples and on their cultural identification benefit, appealing to children's need for conformity. In doing so, she would in effect transform the apple from a fruit into a biological artifact with the cultural function of indicating membership in the group of "older boys."

4.1. The cultural function of consumption

Sperber (forthcoming a) discusses the biological and cultural functions of natural objects and artifacts, and shows that the differences are not as sharp as they may appear at first sight. The apple's biological function is to provide nutrition. Its cultural function is the one described above to indicate membership in the group of older boys. By exploiting the cultural function in order to sell more apples, the marketer turns the apples into a "biological cultural artifact" (Sperber forthcoming a, 9), one for which the intended, artifactual function (to make apples a sign of membership in the older group) coincides with its cultural teleofunction, namely the cultural function which ensures its propagation and continued use. In this case, the trend of eating apples in the playground propagates to a wider group, possibly to other schools who have heard about this trend, and ensures further apple production and consumption. I will argue later in this chapter that the two functions can end up reinforcing each other to a point where it becomes

difficult to identify which is the driving factor in production and consumption.

4.2. Marketing a product's cultural function

In general, as I showed earlier in this chapter, goods and services are designed as part of a complex strategic process. The marketer is typically driven by a commercial intention, to make a profit, to gain market share, to support another product, to test a market, to confuse the competition, etc. To fulfill this intention, a product is developed to appeal to the specific needs or intentions of a set of consumers.

Typically, as we have seen throughout this thesis, many of our actions fulfill a number of intentions rather than only a single one. Although one intention may be particularly salient to the individual, it usually results from an elaborate network of higher-order intentions ranging, for instance, from being healthier to impressing others. For the marketer, understanding and, frequently, manipulating how a product will be used and what range of intentions it will fulfill is vital. A product manager for a brand of diet gourmet mozzarella cheese must decide, for instance, whether the cheese should be sold alongside the Italian fresh mozzarella in the imported gourmet cheese section, or in the diet cheese section with other tasteless cheese. Guessing that health-conscious, diet-driven consumers will probably avoid the imported cheese section and its many temptations, the marketer “positions” his product as a diet product and identifies it as “mozzarella light,” hoping that it will stand out as more desirable than other diet products, rather than a gourmet product, which might be perceived as less desirable than other gourmet items. This may be the first brand attribute consumers are exposed to, something like: “diet cheese that is different.” A consumer, looking for diet cheese in the diet section, is pleasantly surprised to find fresh mozzarella, and buys it. In another case, an entrepreneur-baker,

launching a line of “homemade cakes,” understands that her product will enable consumers to “pretend that they baked it themselves,” offering an opportunity to impress others; again, this may be the first attributes of the brand many consumers encounter. To offer added convenience to her busy potential customers, she distributes her cakes through a chain of upscale supermarkets and develops a poster that shows a proud mother in a business suit serving a gorgeous cake to her appreciative family. A consumer who wants to impress other parents by bringing a seemingly homemade cake to the school bake sale remembers the posters, as her intention to provide a “homemade” cake activates the “homemade” attributes. She forms a plan to stop by the supermarket’s bakery section and buy a cake in hope of passing it off as homemade. Clearly, if the supermarket has run out of the “homemade” cakes, she will probably look for another “homemade” source, or resort to baking it herself, rather than face the stigma of buying a mass-produced cake which would not satisfy her intention to show that she is a “worthy mother who can bake.”

By highlighting the persuasive effects of the brands rather than of specific promotional messages, the two examples just discussed show the importance of the right attributes being activated for the customer to fulfill her salient intentions when exposed to a brand. These attributes in effect have as their function to ensure the propagation of the brand and its success. In the case of the diet cheese, the customer identifies the brand’s function as enabling her to “diet while eating something good.” In the case of the homemade cakes, the “homemade” attribute is most salient, and is associated with the function of allowing you to “pretend you baked it yourself.” In neither of the two cases, does the product’s mentally represented function exactly match the more basic intentional nature of the item. The customers are not buying “cheese” or “cake” merely as food items: rather, they are acquiring these products

in order to fulfill a broader set of higher-order intentions. The cheese is purchased as a diet item that may result in weight loss and/or better self-image; the cake is purchased as a status item to be displayed at the bake sale.

As discussed earlier in this section, in addition to being influenced by cultural factors, consumption choices also shape and reinforce cultures. I will now consider each of these functions of consumption and show how they may affect consumer choices.

4.3. Co-opting the cultural function of consumption

A product performs its cultural function in the course of performing its basic function. The cultural function of a product is manipulated very effectively by professional marketers: it often goes beyond the basic function and, in some cases, it actually usurps it (arguably, the “homemade” cake doesn’t even have to be a cake, it could be any other item that enables the mother to show her involvement in her child’s school). This type of manipulation is, of course, very similar to the one described earlier in this thesis in the more general case of persuasive communication, and rests on the persuader/marketer harnessing, or co-opting, the adaptive power of heuristics to fulfill her persuasive intention. The branding strategy is simply a special case of persuasive communication that does not rely on a specific communication event, but rather on a more general range of stimuli delivered across a variety of media.

Many consumer goods and services play a much more complex and, often, important part in the lives of consumers than their basic function would suggest. For a simple store-bought cake to be perceived as holding the key to a mother’s status in her child’s school clearly represents a dramatic shift of the cake’s function from providing “pleasurable food” to being “proof of one’s worthiness as a mother.” It

is this feature of the cultural function of consumer goods that makes it so susceptible to co-option by marketers. Beyond fulfilling its basic function, food, for instance, has both a personal function of pleasure, and many cultural functions. Food, in many cultures, is traditionally consumed in groups, and plays an important role in enjoyment and leisure. The preparation of food has also traditionally been associated with giving, sharing and nurturing. Similar shifts in the functions of goods and services can be seen across categories. Clothing and music play an important role in enabling individuals to define themselves to others. In the service sector, banks, airlines and internet service providers all have important cultural functions for consumers.

As I showed in the previous section, marketers can exploit cultural functions to differentiate an item from its competitors. The new “homemade” cakes range is positioned as a way to impress one’s friends and families, rather than a dessert. It should come as no surprise that the cultural function is sometimes more important than a product’s basic function in the initial development phase: products can be developed with the specific goal of selling them for their cultural function rather than what might be thought of as their basic function. For instance, because the traditions of food preparation and consumption have shifted greatly along with changes in the roles of women in many Western cultures, food marketers have developed convenience “designer” foods meant to be consumed with little or no preparation, on the run rather than in a leisurely way. These designer foods are marketed as fulfilling the more traditional aspects of food sharing and nurturing in addition to their basic nutritional function. Examples of these “designer foods” are breakfast cereal bars that offer convenience and a great deal of sugar, and are aimed to appeal to mothers in their role as providers, by claiming to offer all the benefits of a home-prepared cereal breakfast.

To summarize, consumption is driven at the individual level by much more than the basic biological or artifactual function of the consumed goods and services. Consumption also fulfills important, often cultural, functions that are targeted by marketers either in conjunction with, or instead of, the basic function. In the case of a commodity item such as bread, for instance, the marketer is not trying to persuade consumers to purchase bread, but rather to purchase her brand rather than any of the two or three other leading brands. In order to do so, she cannot rely simply on the basic function of bread, as it is equally well performed by the competing brands. Rather, she may appeal to the higher-order intention to be a “good provider,” which is widely shared. Marketers make use of their own knowledge of persuasion (derived from “folk psychology” as well as acquired marketing skills), knowing that targeting higher-order intentions, in particular adaptive tendencies such as wanting to be a good provider, increases the likelihood of successful persuasion.

4.4. Effects of consumption on culture

Consumption can be seen as having two opposite effects on culture: on the one hand it has a homogenizing effect, and on the other, it has a polarizing effect. The homogenizing effect is clear to anyone visiting a high street, commercial area, or shopping center in Europe, North America or in most Asian countries. The same stores propose similar, if not identical, items from one country to the next, transcending local cultures and national boundaries. A German teenager wears the same clothes, listens to the same music, sees the same movies and eats roughly the same food as a youngster in Malaysia. The ubiquitous brands of large multi-national corporations have helped homogenize huge sections of society around the globe.

Consumption also has a reverse, polarizing effect on society. I have discussed the importance of consumption in establishing identity and role. Consumers use their consumption choices to differentiate themselves from others, and the effect of this differentiating tendency against a homogenizing backdrop is the emergence of smaller groups whose members identify themselves particularly strongly through the consumption decisions they make. In other words, while global brands are widely available and consumed, particular groups choose specific items, styles or trends with which they identify closely and strongly, and avoid the consumption of other items that are associated with other groups. This “polarization” trend is clearly visible in the domains of clothing, entertainment and leisure, and, more generally, in all aspects of popular culture and thought. The two opposing trends, homogenization and polarization, are both produced by mass communication structures and global economies, and more specifically of global marketing strategies. Marketers attempting to exploit the benefits of the homogenization and polarization tendencies for their own benefit face a difficult task. An effort to capitalize on homogenization can result in polarization, and vice versa. While a global identity can be established rather efficiently, understanding the subtle variations in what individual groups identify with, and how these groups are defined, is a complex task, and requires very tight monitoring of the collective pulse of these groups.

The dynamics of and the interaction between marketing and the different functions of goods and services are highlighted in some recent research on the relation between food marketing and dietary preferences in the US (Smith, forthcoming). The American diet, to an even greater extent than that of other consumer societies, has become increasingly unhealthy, leading to a veritable obesity epidemic. This severe dysfunction is widely blamed on marketing in general, and in particular

on the manufacturers and sellers of fast food, convenience food, designer food and the like. Smith, however, argues that the food industry is not necessarily to blame. In his view, the economics of free and informed choice should correct the effects of these excesses of marketing and allow consumers to assert their preferences.

Unfortunately, weighing in on the side of unhealthy food manufacturers and against healthy food choices are maladaptive preferences that direct consumers precisely to those foods that are unhealthy. How have these preferences developed and what makes them maladaptive? Ironically, they evolved in order to direct humans toward the most efficient sources of nutrition, but have failed to adapt fast enough to the accelerated changes in production brought about by consumer societies. The specific signs that were sought by efficient food gatherers in search of proper nutrition led to the evolution of preferences for (a) food favored by others, an indication of reliability, (b) sweet and salty food, an indication of fruit ripeness and of the scarce but beneficial presence of sodium in natural foods, and (c) “post-ingestive satiety,” the physical feeling of having eaten to satiety without the nausea associated with eating contaminated food. However, these specific signs are no longer natural occurrences simply waiting to be perceived by consumers’ relevant nutrition-seeking modules, but rather, according to Smith, exploited in over-designed food products, specifically targeting the maladaptive preferences built into these modules.

Examples of the extreme effects of marketing on large segments of society have become commonplace, and are attracting scrutiny either from consumer watchdogs or, in countries where they are effective or pretend to be so ³, from some regulatory agencies. Recent reports of snack food manufacturers targeting children via “viral marketing”

³ “Revealed, how food firms target children,” *The Guardian*, London, 27 May 2004

techniques have provoked calls for regulatory action in the UK, and have attracted increasing governmental scrutiny. However, one does wonder whether the publication of yet another “white paper” or congressional report is not just another well-timed move in a government’s own campaign to persuade the public that such issues will not be brushed under the carpet. Once the stories have left the newspaper headlines, marketers, after receiving a mild reprimand, are free to return to similar practices, albeit with some minor changes. Industries and corporations that have come under heavier attack have sometimes reluctantly mended their ways, but often only cosmetically. Recent examples include fast food restaurant chains which, after decades of marketing unhealthy, fat-laden meals to increasingly overweight children and their convenience-seeking parents, are now introducing “healthy” alternatives including branded apples.

4.5. The feedback effect

Having examined how marketers use cultural biases to provide their brands with cultural functions, and how these brands themselves contribute to cultural trends, I now want to look at some cases in which the second mechanism feeds back into the first, so that culture itself ends up doing the job of the persuader. In this situation, the brand manager need only observe the process without much intervention, and reap the rewards.

Here is a particularly striking case of this type of feedback mechanism. For years, the consumption of Cognac in the US had been declining, as neither the high alcohol content of Cognac nor the practice of lingering long enough after a meal to enjoy a glass of Cognac suited the lifestyle of its traditional market base of affluent, well-educated, European-vacationing consumers. Things turned around very quickly when a new group of affluent Americans, successful hip-hop and rap

recording artists, started drinking Cognac and enjoying it. As Cognac-drinking gained in popularity among these artists, it started spreading to their fan base and audiences, and sales of Cognac shot up, especially among young African-Americans. Marking the official entry of Cognac into rap culture were references to Cognac brands in songs by some of the most popular artists, as shown in this excerpt from an award-winning song by Busta Rhymes and P. Diddy⁴. The song makes reference to the Hennessy, Rémy Martin and Courvoisier brands of Cognac, as well as to Louis Roederer Cristal Champagne, another French luxury good turned rap symbol:

“Busta: "Give me the Henny. You can give me the Cris.

You can pass me the Remy, but pass the Courvoisier."

Diddy: "You could give me the dough. You can give me

'dro, but pass the Courvoisier..."

Once integrated into the culture, the artifact comes under adaptive pressure to better fulfill a wider range of needs. Whereas Cognac is appreciated “straight up” under some circumstances, it is also often mixed with fruit juices and/or other liquors. As a taste develops for lighter and fruitier variations, there is growing demand for Cognac-based pre-mixed drinks. New brands such as Hpnotiq, a blue-tinged blend of Cognac, vodka and fruit juice, have more recently appeared on the market and are growing rapidly⁵.

⁴ The song won a Black Entertainment Television award in 2002 and was nominated for a Grammy award the same year.

⁵ Details about the Cognac and rap culture case described here were collected from the following articles on the internet: “Cognac is in the house” by Kenneth Hein, *Brandweek.com*, September, 22, 2003 (http://www.newmediastrategies.net/buzz_brandweek2.html); “Rhyme pays: creating cool,” *CBC.com* (Canadian Broadcasting Corp.), excerpted from the program “Rhyme Pays, Hip Hop and the Marketing of Cool” aired April 6, 2004 on CBC-TV’s Marketplace, (http://www.cbc.ca/rhymepays/creating_cool.html); and “Thirsty rappers

This example illustrates a frequent process by which the marketing strategy and its cultural effects feed back into each other and result in a self-reinforcing cycle. It is often difficult, at this stage to pinpoint what is the cause and what is the effect. Marketers eager to take credit for such an innovative and successful strategy might want to hint that they helped foster the connection, but do not want to claim credit overtly for having manipulated it (particularly, in this case, with a product that epitomizes French culture and tradition). There have been some suggestions that the Busta Rhymes/P. Diddy song was in fact commissioned by the venerable Courvoisier “house.” If so, it clearly could not have been overtly acknowledged, in spite of the personal satisfaction and professional recognition the admission of such a brilliant move could bring its instigator. A Canadian television program that examined this story as part of a report on marketing to fans of rap and hip hop music commented as follows:

“What remains one of the most obscure aspects of the music industry is whether or not companies pay hip hop artists in advance to “shout out” their products in lyrics. De Bartolomeo⁶ insists there was no association with Busta Rhymes before the single was released. The rappers were invited to a fashion show sponsored by Courvoisier and the brand stuck in their head. Only afterwards did they write the song of their own accord. Simmons⁷ says a cheque was sent to the rappers when the song became a hit, but

boost Allied Domecq” by Mike Verdin, October 21, 2004, *timesonline.co.uk*, (*Times*, London, (<http://business.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,9065-1321513,00.html>).

⁶ Stephanie DeBartolomeo, Director of Marketing for Courvoisier, North America.

⁷ “Urban Marketer” and rap music promoter, Russell Simmons.

DeBartolomeo disagrees,” (“Rhyme Pays, Selling Cool,” CBC.com, reference in footnote 4 above).

A similar question is raised by another journalist analyzing the case (Hein, 2003, “Cognac is in the house”, Brandweek.com, reference in footnote 4 above):

“It’s a bit of a chicken-and-egg question: was it Hennessy’s early marketing outreach that seeded the trend, or was it consumers who discovered Hennessy on their own, and were later embraced by the brand?”

The question of whether the trend grew out of the rappers’ need for Cognac or a marketer’s mind is important in the broader perspective of calls by consumer advocates for marketers to accept responsibility for the effects of their actions on consumers in general, as I’ll show in Sections 5 and 6.

Feedback effects such as that illustrated above have been discussed by some biologists and anthropologists under the heading “niche construction” effects (e.g., Laland et al., 2000). Niche constructions are the alterations that individuals make to their environments by the addition of artifacts (either biological or cultural). In discussing Laland et al.’s research, Aunger (forthcoming b, 3-4) summarizes the effects of these alterations in a cultural (rather than biological) context:

“...such alterations can subsequently influence the kinds of selection pressures that any species interacting with that modified feature of the environment will experience. As a result, population dynamics and the course of evolution can change. Niche construction introduces a feedback loop

between behavior and its physical products, artifacts.”

(Aunger, forthcoming b, 3-4)

In the cases I have discussed, the effects of marketing on culture are greatly enhanced and accelerated by this feedback loop. To summarize what I have claimed is going on: as a result of a successful marketing campaign, a particular brand is adopted en masse by a segment of the market, and becomes entrenched in the culture of that “adoptive” segment. The cultural effects on the adopters alter the demand for the product, but may also result in pressures to fashion the product so that it more closely meets the demands of the adoptive segment.

5. Marketing in consumer cultures

5.1. Push and pull strategies – what comes first?

Marketing strategies are sometimes seen as dividing into two main types – push strategies and pull strategies – depending on whether the central goal is to meet consumer demand for the product, or the product is “pushed” and promoted to consumers. This division roughly coincides with the use of the two types of persuasive strategies I have discussed in this chapter: on the one hand, a brand-driven type of strategy that stimulates the development of consumer demand by positioning a product as a solution to consumers’ needs or intentions, and on the other hand, a strategy based on the delivery of a message aimed at pushing the product by promoting it. This distinction was illustrated in the Cognac/rap case discussed in the last section.

In consumer behavior research, these two types of strategies are usually analyzed in terms of the cognitive processes they trigger: a bottom-up process starting with a marketer-driven stimulus, or a top-down process triggered by consumers’ needs or intentions. In fact, the

top-down process is often affected by exposure to a stimulus such as an ad, making it difficult to draw a sharp distinction between the two strategies and the processes they trigger.

One of the interesting issues at the center of the debate on the increasingly controversial role of marketing in consumer society is who drives the process of bringing goods and services to market (as seen in media analyses of the Cognac and rap music example above).

Traditionally, marketers have been seen as driving the process, either by launching new brands or marketing existing brands with specific goals (e.g., increasing sales, market share, penetration, repeat purchase, margins, etc.). In achieving these goals, marketers, the employees of consumer product companies, advertising agencies, political campaigns, advocacy groups, etc. are performing their jobs in order to satisfy their bosses and other stakeholders.

In the last decade or two, a somewhat defensive perspective on the role of marketers has emerged from both marketers and some academics, who argue that consumers are the driving force behind the process of bringing products and services to market. For instance, one of the most widely used college marketing textbooks (Kotler and Armstrong, 1998, 3) defines marketing as “the delivery of customer satisfaction at a profit.” According to this view, marketers are simply the facilitators who match customers’ needs to just the right products, a task for which they are rewarded fairly. The issue is whether the consumer’s needs or the firm’s needs come first in driving the marketing process, a particularly interesting question in the context of our study of persuasion. If consumers do indeed drive the process by purchasing what they need, all the marketer needs to do is inform the customer of the existence of the goods and their attributes. In other words, if the marketer simply aims to satisfy the customer, persuading him to adopt the intention of purchasing the item is unnecessary. In that

case, a customer's satisfaction is not "delivered" by the marketer, but depends solely on whether the product matches or exceeds pre-existing needs and expectations.

This analysis is at the center of what is referred to in some of the literature as "relationship marketing," where marketers focus on fostering a long-term relationship with their customers rather than persuading customers to make immediate purchases. However, it seems to me that the description of marketers as seeking to "deliver customer satisfaction" is really a euphemism for "targeting those unfulfilled intentions that will lead the customer to buy the product." It amounts to a "push" strategy over the long term, and puts the emphasis on building brands and consumers' relationships with these brands. A move in this direction is not surprising given the view of adaptive persuasion I have developed in this thesis. Relationship marketing makes the marketer's persuasive intention less obvious to consumers, and creates the illusion that the marketer's role has shifted from persuader to facilitator of the consumer's needs. This shift, however, does not make marketing any less persuasive, nor does it really alter its goals. The same elements are present: persuasive intention, identifying consumers' adaptive intentions, building brands that fulfill these adaptive intentions, and creating the demand for these brands. The process is clearly pushed along by marketers: the notion that consumers are pulling all the strings is illusory.

As consumers' understanding and knowledge of marketing strategies develop, their skepticism and "coping" mechanisms also develop, and marketing must adapt to this increase in skepticism in order to maintain its advantage. This mechanism is no different from the persuasion/counterpersuasion arms race identified by Sperber (2001).

5.2. Consumerism, anti-consumerism and marketing

While the anti-brand movement has received some attention in a few academic circles (in public policy and some areas of economics), it is only just beginning to attract attention from researchers in the field of marketing and consumer behavior, who are interested in identifying the source of the movement and the relation between consumer brands and consumers. For instance, Holt (2002), a consumer research expert, emphasizes the tension inherent in the brand/consumer relationship and discusses the role it has played in the evolution of consumer culture over the last century. He accuses the proponents of mainstream marketing theory, mostly his colleagues in the marketing departments of major business schools, of attempting to cover up the intrinsic antagonism between marketers and consumers by advocating such manipulatively cooperative trends as what I've referred to as relationship marketing:

“Academic marketing theorizes away conflicts between marketing and consumers. Such conflicts result only when firms attend to their internal interests rather than seek to meet consumer wants and needs. The marketing concept declares that, with the marketing perspective as their guide, the interests of firms and consumers align... I want to specify the tensions that exist between how firms brand their products and how people consume,” (Holt, 2002, 70)

Having drawn attention to this conflict, Holt challenges the view, often accepted by consumer movements and other critics of heavy-handed marketing, that these tensions result from firms behaving as “cultural engineers,” whose customers are caught in a consumer culture that is an “irresistible form of cultural authority that generates a limited

set of identities accessed only through their brands.” (ibid., 72). Instead, Holt argues that the issue should be approached using a “dialectical model of consumer culture and branding,” which sees marketers as having “pushed the envelope” of their branding techniques to match every step of the evolution of consumer culture. He traces this evolution from the “modern” era of consumerism, the 1950’s and early ‘60’s, during which, he argues, consumers believed in the “cultural authority” of brands, to the “postmodern consumer culture” that sought “personal sovereignty through brands,” and to the current post-postmodern consumer culture driven by cultivation of the self through brands. The evolution has been driven by consumers themselves, led by trendsetters, who spot the “contradictions” between what they expect of their brands and the artifice crafted by brand managers. An example of these contradictions is the “compression of ironic distance” (ibid., 86). Whereas irony was once used to “deflect perceptions that brand communications intended to shape consumer tastes” (ibid.), it has now become so commonplace in marketing that it has turned into a ridiculous cliché. A further example of increasing contradiction is the search for authenticity. While brand managers once sought to distance their brand from commercialism by associating it with more natural or authentic aspirations, such associations have now lost their edge. Holt’s proposal is very much in line with the adaptive persuasion framework I have been discussing throughout this thesis.

Holt forecasts that what he calls the current “post-postmodern culture” will increasingly value brands “to the extent that they deliver creatively, similar to other cultural products” and “shoulder civic responsibility” (ibid., 88-89). These are similar to the demands voiced by the anti-branding movement. But Holt, interestingly, does not endorse the anti-branding movement’s demands. His conclusion is that consumer resistance is actually working in concert, rather than at odds, with the

corporate world, and that the contradictions it exposes and the resulting adjustments are simply market-driven, a way for the market to “rejuvenate” itself. In other words, the marketplace rules, according to Holt, and consumer resistance conveniently acts as its facilitator and serves its interests by putting up a constant stream of challenges from which greater creativity can flow.

While I agree with much of Holt’s analysis, and with his portrayal of the interaction between the forces of the anti-brand movement and those on the marketers under pressure to keep inventing new persuasive strategies, I believe that his conclusion is flawed for two reasons. The first reason has to do with “external” forces on the consumer/brand equation, including political, regulatory, macro-economic, demographic and ecological considerations. It seems that such developments as overpopulation, the widening gap between rich and poor nations, and climate change will probably exert stronger pressures on the corporate world than the anti-brand movement probably ever would wish to on its own, and that changes will be dictated from outside the brand/consumer market system rather than from within. Only by taking real responsibility for such big issues, rather than merely paying them lip service, will the bigger corporate brands retain their place in a future society of rational consumption. No sign of any willingness to engage in such risky behavior has yet emerged from among the corporate ranks.

The second flaw in Holt’s argument has to do with a point made by Heath (2001) in a similarly thought-provoking article about the futility of anti-corporate rhetoric, but reaching a slightly different conclusion. In his biting criticism, Heath, a philosopher, portrays the anti-consumerist movement as naïvely Romantic and somewhat elitist in its quest to distinguish “between everyday desires and those that are instilled in us through advertising” (ibid, 5). He argues, as does Holt, that the flawed arguments of the anti-consumer movement actually play

into the hands of the multi-national corporate marketers. In his view, the issue is not that consumers are behaving irrationally, desiring the wrong things or engaging in self-defeating behavior by wanting to conform. Instead, in their efforts to steer clear of what they perceive to be blatantly consumerist attitudes and behaviors, they become “hip consumerists,” fostering their own brand of consumerism and benefiting corporate marketers to a greater extent than conformist consumers, by creating and promoting the avant-garde trends that keep marketing exciting and new. The rap/Cognac case I discussed in Section 4.5 may well support this view. Heath comments:

“We (also) need to stop trying to assign corporations all the blame for consumerism. Consumerism is, first and foremost, a product of consumer behavior. The idea that there is some kind of “them,” opposed to “us” is a fiction, a part of the “countercultural idea,” (ibid, 16).

Heath concludes, like Holt, that rejecting consumerism by adopting a “hip” or “trendsetting” attitude and/or behavior is not the solution. However, unlike Holt who blames consumer behavior on the corporate world at large, he holds consumers responsible for their own behavior. The solution may be, he suggests with some irony, to either start wearing uniforms or to stop complaining about consumerism and accept its flaws as the price to pay for individuality.

6. Conclusion

Having examined the mechanisms used by audiences to cope with persuasion stimuli, I agree with Heath’s conclusion. I believe that treating consumers as any less than fully responsible for their responses

to marketing stimuli is simply denying their rationality. The success or failure of marketing efforts rests on consumers' own relevance-guided inferential and practical reasoning processes. All of these processes have been shown to operate under bounded rationality conditions, relying on adaptive norms and dispositions. None of this suggests that any serious danger should arise from exposure to any but the most malevolent forms of marketing. On the other hand, I have also discussed some areas of possible concern: maladaptive dispositions piggy-backing on adaptive behaviors; over-reliance on shortcuts and biases; or finding oneself a step behind, rather than a step ahead, in the persuasion/counterpersuasion arms race. These dispositions suggest the need for active watchdog organizations that monitor and effectively punish clear cases of malevolent behavior by corporate marketers, allied to powerful educational programs that help young people to develop and practice their coping abilities.

On the corporate side, while huge budgets continue to be poured into marketing, market forces do, over the long-term, tend to keep these expenditures under control, to the great regret of advertising agencies and marketing executives. Recent clear winners in very competitive industries such as air transportation have appeared to be the low-cost players who compete with virtually no marketing budgets, but develop innovative forms of marketing in which they rely on the customer to make the first move. These trends, together with reports of lower ad sales revenues for the traditional media, may signal a shift away from exorbitant marketing budgets and from mass-fire strategies, in favor of better-targeted and more pertinent efforts.

Finally, why should anyone really care whether Busta Rhymes and P. Diddy received payment for their song? If they did, they probably laughed and rapped all the way to the bank.

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